

Discharged gay vets sue for reinstatement

SAN FRANCISCO – Three military veterans who were discharged under the law that prohibits gays from serving openly in uniform sued the government Monday to be reinstated and to pressure lawmakers to repeal the “don’t ask, don’t tell” law before a new Congress is sworn in.


The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in San Francisco also seeks to have the ban on openly gay troops declared unconstitutional and therefore unenforceable for any service members.

“I don’t feel like I’m going up against the military, I really don’t. I just feel like this is a necessary step for doing away with this policy,” said former Air Force Staff Sgt. Anthony Loverde. “I believe the military, the majority of troops I’ve served with, and those who have been studied to death are with us.”

The 31-year-old Loverde is working in Iraq for a private military contractor that’s providing the Army with technical support. The lawsuit was also filed on behalf of former Air Force Maj. Michael Almy, 40, and former Navy Petty Officer Second Class Jason Knight, 28.

The legal action came four days after the U.S. Senate for the second time this year blocked a military spending bill that also would have repealed the 17-year-old ban on openly gay troops.

Continued on Next Page



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In this Jan. 17, 2010, file photo Richard Holbrooke, U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, listens to questions during an answers and questions session in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Associated Press

AP source: U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke dies

WASHINGTON (AP) — An administration official says Richard Holbrooke, a longtime U.S. diplomat who wrote part of the Pentagon Papers, was the architect of the 1995 Bosnia peace plan and served as President Barack Obama’s special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, has died. He was 69.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the family had yet to make a formal announcement of Holbrooke’s death Monday in Washington.

Holbrooke, whose forceful style earned him nicknames such as “The Bulldozer” or “Raging Bull,” was admitted to George Washington University Hospital in the nation’s capital on Friday after he became ill. He had surgery Saturday to repair a torn aorta.

The hospital was referring all inquiries to the State Department, which was expected to make an announcement. □



HEALTH CARE UNCERTAIN!

In this March 23, 2010 file photo, President Barack Obama is applauded after signing the health care bill in the East Room of the White House in Washington.

(AP Photo/Charles Dharapak, File)

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Knifeman detained; preschoolers freed

ANGELA CHARLTON

Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Masked French gendarmes detained a 17-year-old armed with two knives who took a class full of preschoolers hostage Monday, releasing all the children safely after hours of

tense negotiations that drew nationwide attention.

Continued on Page A14

Elite gendarme officers release children from a school, after a hostage taking in Besancon, eastern France, Monday Dec.13, 2010.

Associated Press





GAY VETERANS

Continued from Front Page

Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., have introduced a standalone measure, but it's uncertain if it will be brought for a vote before the Senate

and House adjourn for the holidays.

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network director Aubrey Sarvis said the lawsuit was meant as a warning to lawmakers that if they don't act to repeal "don't

ask, don't tell," the courts could step in and order an integration timetable that is less to the Pentagon's liking. "If the Senate fails to act in the lame duck session, we are prepared to litigate this aggressively," said Sarvis,

whose group coordinated the lawsuit and prepared it with lawyers from a private law firm.

"From my perspective, this is the first shot over the bow," he said.

The move also was aimed at validating the concerns of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a named defendant in the suit, along with the service chiefs of the Navy and Air Force.

A Pentagon study unveiled this month found that two-thirds of troops thought repealing the gay ban would have little affect on their units. Gates then joined President Barack Obama in urging the Senate to end "don't ask, don't tell."

He reiterated Friday that if lawmakers do not act, military leaders could end up "at the mercy of the courts and all of the lack of predictability that that entails."

A federal judge in Riverside, Calif., ruled in a different lawsuit in September that the gay ban violates the due process and free speech rights of gay Americans.

U.S. District Judge Virginia Phillips issued a worldwide injunction immediately stopping enforcement of the ban, but the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals suspended Phillips' order.

The suit filed Monday makes the same constitutional claims rooted in a 2003 U.S. Supreme Court position — that private and consensual homosexual activity cannot

be outlawed.

It also relies on a 2008 decision from the 9th Circuit that the Air Force violated the civil rights of flight nurse Margaret Witt when it fired her under "don't ask, don't tell" without demonstrating she needed to be removed to protect her reserve unit's cohesion or readiness.

Lawyers for the three plaintiffs in the latest suit plan to contend that allowing gay service members to serve openly actually strengthens the armed forces by not requiring them to keep their sexual orientations a secret. Almy, a decorated officer who was in the Senate chambers last week when Republicans refused to let the repeal measure advance, said he still hopes lawmakers can be persuaded to take up the standalone bill even if it means postponing their vacations.

The son of an Air Force officer who did not know his son was gay, Almy was discharged in 2006 after another member of the Air Force searching his computer files found a private e-mail Almy had written to another man when he was in Iraq. His 13-year career ended with his being given a police escort off base.

"I spent four Christmases deployed in the Middle East," he said. "If we can make that kind of sacrifice for our nation, certainly our senators can give up a Christmas to get this done." □

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Madoff son's suicide followed battle with trustee

NEW YORK — For two years, the two sons of jailed financier Bernard Madoff portrayed themselves as honest whistleblowers of their father's historic fraud. A court-appointed trustee depicted them as bungling money managers who did nothing to protect investors.

The suicide of Mark Madoff leaves unanswered questions for investors seeking payback for the billions of dollars his father siphoned and for criminal investigators who continued to pursue charging Madoff's family for knowing participation in the fraud.

The 46-year-old Madoff Bernard Madoff's eldest son hanged himself Saturday by a dog leash on a metal ceiling beam in his Manhattan loft apartment, his 2-year-old son asleep in another room. The death was officially ruled a suicide by hanging Sunday by the city medical examiner.

He died on the anniversary of his father's arrest two years ago in the largest Ponzi scheme ever recorded. It followed the filing in recent weeks of dozens of lawsuits by trustee Irving Picard as he pursued billions of dollars in damages against those who profited from the multi-decade fraud.

Increasingly, Picard has stepped up his language in lawsuits against those who knew Madoff well, describing an Austrian banker accused in a lawsuit Friday of being Madoff's "criminal soul mate" in her efforts on behalf of Madoff's fraud.

Last Wednesday, he included the brothers as defendants in an \$80 million lawsuit he brought against the London-based international arm of Madoff's business, saying the overseas operation was used to siphon off money from the fraud for

the Madoff family.

Picard said that for executives in the Madoff business, "pretending things do not exist or looking away may have been a well-honed survival strategy." Picard sought \$200 million from Madoff family members in his lawsuit, which charged that family used the Madoff business like a "piggy bank", spending tens of millions on lavish homes and luxuries.

Mark Madoff and his brother, Andrew, portrayed themselves as heroes who sought to stop their father from committing more fraud. "How ironic it is ... to blame the very two individuals who uncovered and reported the fraud, saving the estate more than \$170 million, for not uncovering it sooner," their lawyer, Martin Flumenbaum, said in court papers earlier this year.

On Sunday, Flumenbaum continued to portray the brothers as innocent of their father's crimes.

"Mark and Andrew Madoff had no prior knowledge of their father's crimes and contacted the U.S. Department of Justice and the SEC immediately after their father told them he had defrauded his investment advisory clients," Flumenbaum said.

A person who had recent contact with Mark Madoff, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the case, said Sunday that Andrew Madoff, a cancer survivor, has occupied himself by helping his fiancée in a business venture. "He's been doing much better than his brother," over the past two years, the person said of Andrew Madoff.

A criminal investigation is still active against the family. Authorities want to know whether Madoff family

members knowingly participated in the fraud. At a minimum, authorities believe they might be able to build a tax fraud case, alleging that Madoff family members failed to fully report all of the income they received directly and indirectly from the family business.

But law enforcement officials said Sunday that they had had no direct contact with either of the brothers or with Bernard Madoff's brother, Peter, in the last year, and said no charges were imminent.

Bernard Madoff's brother, Peter, was derided in court papers by Picard for his work at Madoff's firm as the chief compliance officer.

Picard said Peter Madoff was paid more than \$23 million between 2001 and 2008 in salary, bonuses and other compensation. He said he also withdrew more than \$16 million in fictitious profits from accounts under his control that were the result of "blatant backdating of transactions." A message left Sunday with a lawyer for Peter Madoff was not immediately returned.

Mark Madoff had worked with his father at the company since 1986, while Andrew had been there since 1988. Shana Madoff, the lawyer daughter of Peter Madoff, had worked there since 1995 as compliance counsel and in-house counsel, the court papers said.

In response, Picard argued in court papers that the brothers were senior managers of their father's business who "failed, utterly and completely" to run it.

Investors on Sunday said Mark Madoff's death will make it harder to find answers to how many people knew of the fraud.

Ruth Goldstein, wife of 78-year-old investor Allan Goldstein, a Great



Barrington, Mass., man who lost his life savings in the fraud, called the suicide "the ultimate punishment" for Bernard Madoff.

Madoff is serving a 150-year prison sentence in a North Carolina prison. He admitted having told his clients in November 2008 that \$20 billion in investments had grown to more than \$65 billion when only several hundred million dollars remained.

Mark Madoff's family including his wife, Stephanie, who had been on vacation in Florida has not spoken publicly about the death. Bernie Madoff attorney Ira Sorkin declined to say Sunday whether he had spoken to his 72-year-old client in a North Carolina prison or whether he would attempt to get him freed to attend a funeral.

Ellen Borakove, spokeswoman for the city medical examiner, said the death was ruled a suicide after an autopsy on Sunday. Toxicology tests were also conducted, but results wouldn't be known for weeks, she said.

By late afternoon, she said, Madoff's body had not been claimed. □



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FedEx's busiest day: The pre-game show for Santa



In this Dec. 9, 2010 photo, shipping containers are unloaded from a FedEx cargo plane at the FedEx facility at Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, N.J. The company is now gearing up for the holidays, when it expects to move nearly 16 million packages on the busiest day, about 11 percent higher than last year. The company benefits from an increase in online holiday gift-buying.

(AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

By SAMANTHA BOMKAMP,
AP Transportation Writer
NEW YORK – Call it the
pregame show for Santa and
his elves.

Monday is expected to be
the busiest day in FedEx
history, with nearly 16
million packages moving

on its conveyer belts, trucks
and planes. That's up 13
percent from 14.2 million on
the busiest day last year, and
double what the company
handles on a normal day.
That jump in shipments bodes
well for the nation's retailers,
online stores and larger rival

UPS, which has its single
busiest day next week.

About half of the increase is
from the company's SmartPost
partnership with the U.S.
Postal Service. SmartPost
moves lighter, cheaper
packages through FedEx that
are then delivered by a postal
worker. A growing number of
online and catalog purchases
is driving growth in that unit
and across the company.

Online holiday spending since
Nov. 1 is up 12 percent over
last year to nearly \$22 billion,
according to research company
comScore. Last Monday and
Wednesday ranked in the top
five days for online spending
ever, comScore said.

Consumers are using smart
phones and other mobile
devices, as well as computers,
to buy and ship. Online
auction and shopping website
eBay said Monday that
Sunday was its busiest mobile
shopping day so far this year.
In the U.S. shoppers bought
\$5 million worth of items on
eBay, more than double on the

same Sunday last year. Ebay
expects mobile users to buy
\$1.5 billion worth of good
this year compared with \$600
million last year.

Online orders overall are likely
to spike again this Friday,
which many merchants are
promoting as "Free Shipping
Day."

Online spending increases
come with modestly brighter
prospects for holiday spending
in general. Retail experts
predict total spending will
increase by 2 to 4 percent over
last year.

Severe weather, including
a weekend blizzard in the
Midwest, is not hindering
deliveries significantly
on FedEx's busiest day,
spokeswoman Deborah Willig
said. There are scattered
road closures and dangerous
driving conditions in parts
of the Midwest. Snow is
still falling around the Great
Lakes.

Although this week is the
busiest for both UPS and
FedEx, you still have time to

send packages to be under the
tree by Christmas. The last day
for guaranteed FedEx ground
service delivery is Friday.
Procrastinators can choose
more expensive options like
FedEx two-day shipping until
Tuesday, Dec. 21, or overnight
service through Dec. 23.

UPS expects its busiest day
closer to Christmas, on Dec.
22 when it will move about
24 million packages. That's
60 percent more than a normal
day. The Atlanta-based
company will accept packages
for Christmas delivery through
Dec. 23. FedEx's busiest day
is the high water mark of a
holiday season in which it
expects to move 223.3 million
shipments worldwide. That's
86 packages delivered every
second from Thanksgiving
Day to Christmas Eve. UPS
will deliver almost double that
— 430 million packages —
between the two holidays.

This week FedEx will move
more than 63 million packages
compared with 57.5 million
last year. □



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Sex offender pleads not guilty in NY woman's death

GOSHEN, N.Y. — A sex offender pleaded not guilty Monday in the killing of an aspiring dancer who vanished two years ago after leaving a New York City nightclub with him, and his lawyer wants to get him out of prison on bail. Michael Mele, 25, is charged with murder, manslaughter and evidence tampering in the death of Laura Garza, 25, who had moved from McAllen, Texas to New York five months before her disappearance. He could face 25 years to life in prison if he's convicted of murder. Mele, wearing a green jail jumpsuit and a buzz cut, his hands cuffed in front of him and shackled to his waist, pleaded not guilty through his attorney, John Ingrassia, in Orange County Court. Prosecutors believe Garza was killed in Orange County, where Mele lived. Ingrassia won permission from County Judge Nicholas De Rosa to file a bail application in writing. Mele is already jailed for violating his parole as a sex offender, but that sentence could end as soon as Dec. 24. □

Judge throws health care overhaul into uncertainty

By MARK SHERMAN
ERICA WERNER,

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's historic health care overhaul was thrown into uncertainty Monday by a federal judge's decision to declare its central provision unconstitutional. Almost certainly headed to the Supreme Court, the issue hands ammunition to Republican opponents as they try to repeal the far-reaching law in the new Congress.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Henry E. Hudson marked the first time that portions of the new law have been struck down. The decision follows earlier rulings by Democratic appointees in favor of the law.

Hudson declared that the law's central requirement for nearly all Americans to carry insurance is unconstitutional, well beyond Congress' power under the Constitution's Commerce Clause or other provisions. He denied requests to strike down the law in its entirety or block it from being implemented while his ruling is appealed by the administration.

"An individual's personal decision to purchase — or decline to purchase — health insurance from a private provider is beyond the historical reach of the Commerce Clause," said Hudson, a 2002 appointee of President George W. Bush.

Nevertheless, the White House predicted it would prevail in the Supreme Court, although it may be a year or two before the health care law gets there. The next step for the Virginia lawsuit is the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., where Democratic-appointed judges

hold a majority.

But in the short term, the latest court ruling hands potent ammunition to GOP opponents as they prepare to assert control in the new Congress in January with promises to repeal the law. Obama has promised to veto any repeal legislation and appears likely to be able to prevail since Democrats retain control of the Senate. Republicans also have discussed trying to starve the law of funding.

Hudson's ruling may create uncertainty around the administration's efforts to implement the landmark legislation extending health coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans. And it can only increase the public's skepticism, which has not significantly receded in the months since the law's enactment — defying Obama's prediction that it would become more popular as the public got to know it.

Obama aides said implementation would not be affected, noting that the individual insurance requirement and other major portions of the legislation don't take effect until 2014. Underscoring the potential for Hudson's ruling to become a political cudgel for the new Republican House majority, incoming House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, quickly cautioned states



This 2010 handout photo provided by US District Judge Henry Hudson, shows Hudson at the court in Richmond, Va. Hudson declared a key provision of the Obama administration's health care law unconstitutional Monday, siding with Virginia's attorney general in a dispute that both sides agree will ultimately be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

(AP Photo)

against "investing time and resources in Obamacare's implementation now that its central mandate has been ruled unconstitutional."

"Republicans have made a pledge to America to repeal this job-killing health care law, and that's what we're going to do," said Boehner. Calls to repeal the law were a staple of Tea Party campaign rallies this year.

White House officials sought to downplay the significance of the ruling, noting that two other federal judges have upheld the law as constitutional in recent months, and that other lawsuits are going forward. Arguments in a lawsuit by 20 states against the legislation

gets under way Thursday in Florida.

That suit also challenges whether the federal government can require states to expand their Medicaid programs.

"The bill will continue to have its day in court," said White House press secretary Robert Gibbs.

"Challenges like this are nothing new in terms of laws that have come before the courts in the past in which our position has prevailed. We're confident that it is constitutional." □

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Katrina shooting victim's skull still missing



Zachary Massey, right, best friend of Henry Glover, who police were alleged to have shot and later burned his body in a car in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, hugs supporters outside the courthouse after a jury reached a split verdict in New Orleans, Thursday, Dec. 9, 2010.

By MARY FOSTER,
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS – Rebecca

(AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

Glover said her family could not have been more horrified by what happened to her

nephew: He was shot by police days after Hurricane Katrina hit, then left to die in a car that a police officer drove to a deserted levee and set ablaze. Now she wants to know what happened to her nephew's skull.

Glover said the family was relieved after a jury last week convicted three current or former officers in Henry Glover's death, the burning of his body and the doctoring of a report on the shooting.

"But I still want to know what they did with his head," she said. "We want his skull back."

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and even New Orleans Police Superintendent Ronal

Serpas want to find out what happened to the skull.

Orleans Parish coroner Dr. Frank Minyard said Glover's skull was not among the disconnected bones that arrived at the makeshift morgue set up after the storm.

"The skull was something that would have been extremely important," Minyard said on Monday. "We would have been able to determine if he was shot in the head."

The cause of Glover's death remains listed as unclassified, Minyard said. He said one of the bones had metal fragments that could have come from a gunshot wound, or from the burned car.

William Tanner, a motorist who picked up the wounded Glover and drove him to a temporary police station looking for help, said he later saw Glover's skull in the back of his burned car, and even has pictures of it.

"It was there and then it was just gone," Tanner said. "Somebody took it."

In 2009, a Pittsburgh television station aired a report that showed video shot by a pair of Pennsylvania detectives who were in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The video

showed a skull in the back of the burned car.

The NAACP's New Orleans branch has asked the U.S. Justice Department to keep its investigation open until investigators determine what happened to Glover's skull.

If they cannot find the skull, the civil rights group is asking the judge to make it a significant part of the sentencing process, said Danatus King, president of the NAACP's New Orleans branch.

"The only information we have is the knowledge that (the officers) benefited by the skull being missing," King said. "The skull could have shown that Mr. Glover was shot in the head. So with it missing, who benefits?"

U.S. Attorney Jim Letten said on Monday he could not comment on the missing skull. A former officer, David Warren, was convicted of manslaughter for shooting Glover. Officer Greg McRae was found guilty of driving the car the dying man was in to the levee and setting it on fire. Lt. Travis McCabe was convicted of writing a false report on the shooting and of lying to the FBI and a grand jury. □

Teen accused in stabbing of California girl, baby

VACAVILLE, Calif. – A Northern California boy faced attempted murder and sexual assault charges Monday after police say he raped a 13-year-old girl and attacked her baby brother in their home. Police said the young victims were home alone at the time of the break-in early Sunday in Vacaville.

The 14-year-old suspect allegedly raped and stabbed the girl more than 30 times. The 18-month-old infant awoke during the attack, prompting the boy to also stab him more than 10 times, police said. The suspect is an acquaintance of the victims' older brother, said Mark Mazzaferro, a Vacaville city spokesman speaking on behalf of the police.

The victims' father, told KTVU-TV on Monday that his son was in juvenile hall at the time of the attack. The Associated Press is not naming the father to protect the identity of the girl, who is the alleged victim of a sex crime.

He said he and his ex-wife share joint custody of their children. Sgt. Denise Quatman told the Vacaville Reporter newspaper that the 13-year-old girl showed "great courage" by somehow getting the suspect to fall asleep, allowing her an opportunity to grab her brother and escape to a neighbor's house and call 911. The girl and her brother remain hospitalized in critical condition, but are expected to survive.

Quatman said a SWAT team found the male teen asleep in the victims' home and arrested him without incident. He was being held in the Solano County Juvenile Hall on suspicion of two counts of attempted murder and sexual assault. □

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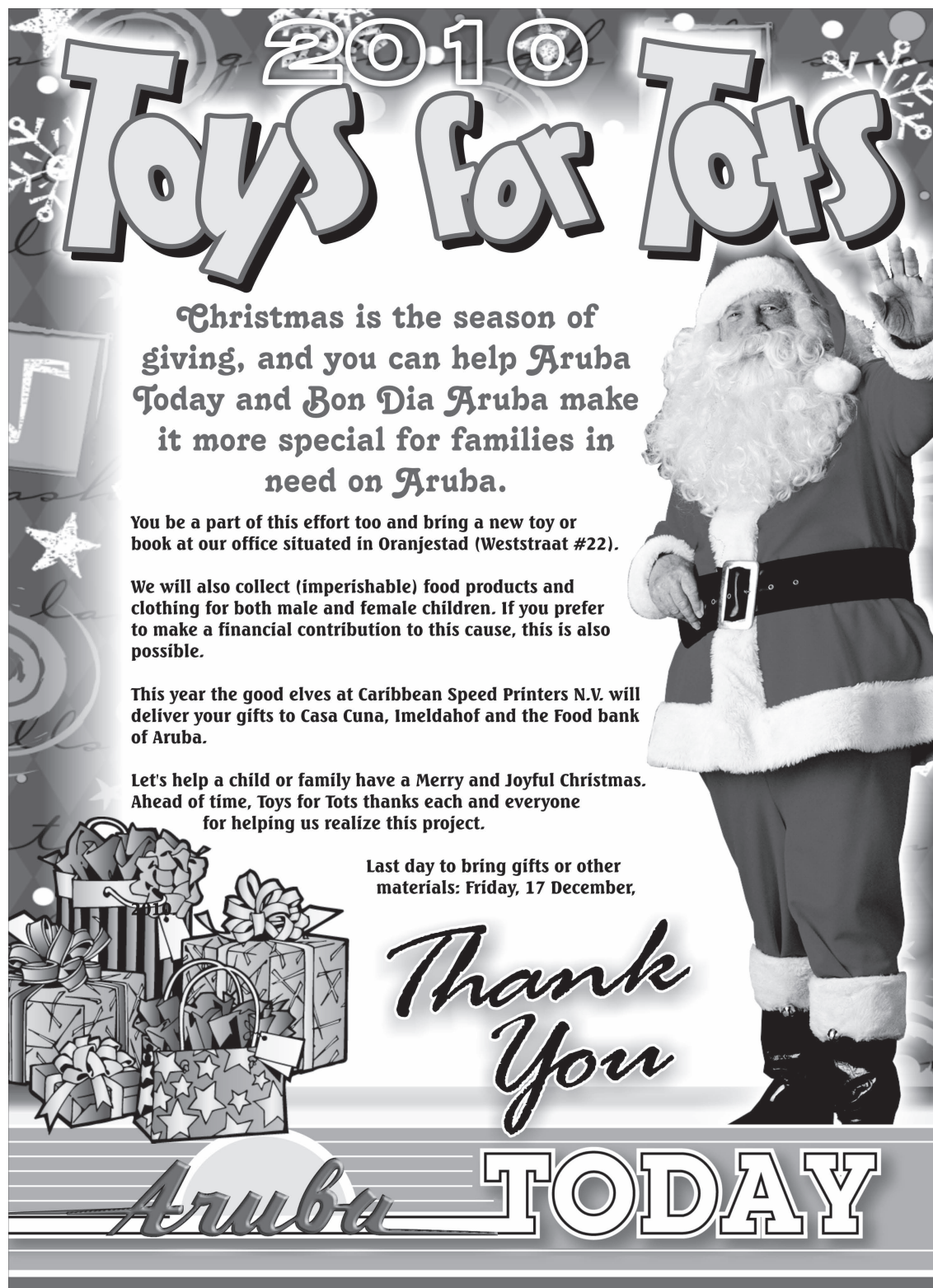
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Zissles launches Dueling PianoZ

PASEO HERENCIA - A new night out full of live entertainment starts tomorrow, December 15th as Zissles will launch a brand-new concept called Dueling PianoZ. This new piano concept combines 2 piano's and a drummer into an interactive show. Almost every song you can imagine can be played, from Whitney Houston to Eminem and Shakira. While playing and singing the players entertain the crowd and both guests and players standing on top of the piano's is not a strange phenomena.

The concept comes from both the USA as Europe and has proven itself favored by all ages, from 18 to 65. Famous bars like Crazy Piano's in Scheveningen (NL) and Miami (US) see a crowd going crazy every single week. To do the same down here Zissles will make sure that only the best pianists from around the world will be performing here on Aruba.

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Dueling PianoZ will run 6 days a week, Monday – Saturday, starting straight after the dinner show at 10 PM. Minimum age: 21. □



After \$97 million investment

Valero to restart its Aruba refinery

ORANJESTAD, Aruba (AP) — Valero Energy Corp. announced Monday that it is restarting its Aruba refinery, which has been idle for a year and a half. The San Antonio, Texas-based company shut down the refinery in July 2009 as falling prices for its refined products made the plant less profitable. The Aruba refinery had a capacity of about 275,000 barrels a day.

In a Monday statement, Valero Executive Vice President Kim Bowers said that the restart process will begin within days and all refinery units are expected to be operating by the end of January. The company says it spent more than \$90 million in getting the refinery back on line.

"We are very happy to announce that the refinery, which is a crucial part of Aruba's economy, will soon be in operation," Bowers said. Restarting the facility is a big boon for the Dutch Caribbean island of 105,000 people. The Valero refinery employs

more than 650 full-time workers and the company says it represents more than 12 percent of Aruba's gross domestic product.

Government officials and a spokesman for the Independent Oil Workers Union of Aruba, which represents most of the plant's employees, did not immediately return calls for

comment on Monday.

Valero, the largest refining company in the U.S., bought the Aruba plant in 2004 and had been looking to sell it. But in June, Valero announced that a tax settlement with Aruba along with an improved economy made it possible to restart the refinery.

On Monday, the government

of Aruba and Valero also signed a memorandum of understanding to deliver liquefied natural gas to the Caribbean island, which will help reduce utility costs. Generating power through liquefied natural gas rather than fuel oil will likely reduce costs both for the refinery and the island. □



At the Crystal Theater

Red Carpet for "The Tourist"



ORANJESTAD – An elegant crowd bought tickets for the Red Carpet Premier of the Tourist at the Crystal Theater. The comic thriller with superstars Angelina Jolie and Johnny Depp, set against the backdrops of gorgeous Paris and Venice, did not disappoint as it packed both fun and suspense, into 103 much-

enjoyed minutes. The Red Carpet event explained theater manager Steve Hudson was designed to introduce the superb movie-watching experience to wide audiences and showcase the style and comfort of the Crystal Theater to movie fans, locals and visitors. The nicely-orchestrated and



decorated event featured delicious butler-passed hors d'oeuvres, attractive cheese and fruit displays, champagne,



wines and cocktails enjoyed in the fully adorned Christmas-decked Renaissance Mall. As the movie time approached patrons were invited to pose Oscar-style against the movie's name with paparazzi clicking their camera shutters. A selection of chocolate covered strawberries, chocolate brownies, and

chocolate malted milk balls was offered by gloved servers before the beginning of the movie paired with a peach champagne cocktail. The tremendous movie came alive with the surround sound on the Crystal Theater's giant screen, delivering unforgettable movie-magic to a packed auditorium. □



At Amazonia Churrascaria

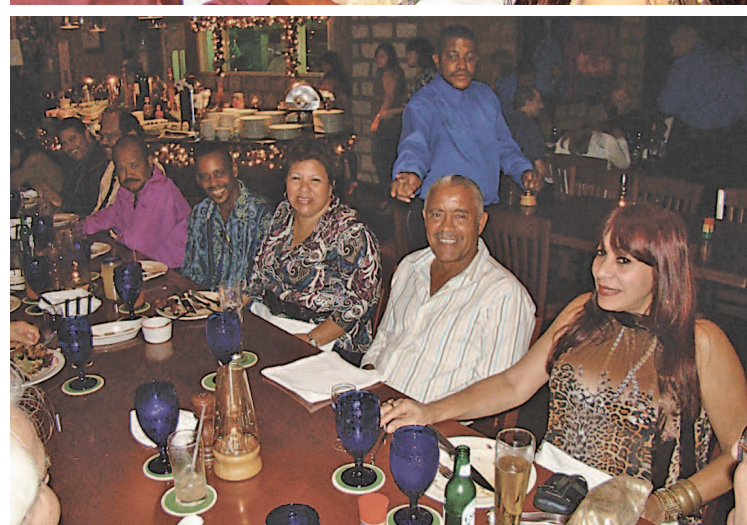
Quality Appliances group enjoy Holiday Spirit



PALM BEACH – The tradition of entertaining family members, friends and colleagues over delicious dinner and drinks in December is one of the special features of the holiday season. Quality Appliances a popular stop for holiday gifts, hosted a dinner party at Amazonia Churrascaria during the first part of December before things got hectic they explained.

Amazonia Churrascaria offers a variety of holiday menu such as the Mistletoe Special, the Jingle Bell Special, the Christmas Carol Special, and the Golden Star Special which all include exclusive features and make the famous Palm Beach Brazilian-style steak house very attractive to big and small groups eating as much or as little as they please.

The restaurant also makes gift certificates available designed to delight meat-lovers among friends, employees and family members. □



Aqua Grill...“the hip restaurant that is heaven on earth for seafood lovers,” *Fodor's Travel Guide*

Among the island's many fine restaurants, Aqua Grill is the premier seafood sensation. Excitingly prepared in an open-view kitchen, fresh local catches join delicacies from waters abroad, including live Maine lobster, Norwegian salmon, sashimi tuna, and Alaskan king crab, along with a selection of non-seafood dishes.

Aqua Grill's award-winning chef offers a menu of classic and contemporary dishes. The fresh seafood is prepared in a variety of regional styles, melding local island charm with the traditions of New England, the spices of Jamaica, the zesty flavors of Italy, the mystique of Indonesia, and beyond. In addition to a selection of authentic dishes, your seafood

can also be prepared wood-grilled, broiled, poached, steamed, or pan-fried upon request. Complimenting the menu is the island's largest raw bar and a generous wine list of over one hundred selections.

Set in a contemporary decor combining the traditions of a New England fish house with the ease and character of the Caribbean, Aqua Grill's warm, island hospitality is the final ingredient to the complete dining experience on Aruba.

Open nightly from 6pm to 11pm, 5:00pm to 11:00pm on Sunday. Located across the street from the Radisson Resort and next door to Amazonia Churrascaria. Tel.: 586-5900



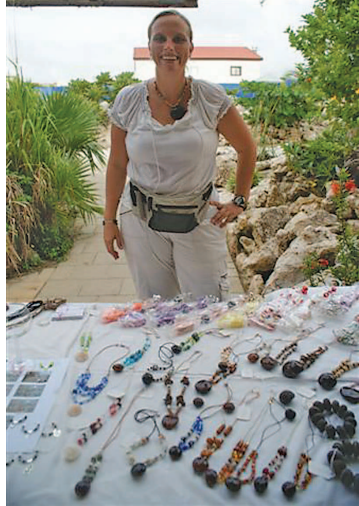
Bring this ad with you and receive
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Valid with purchase of main course. Not valid with any other promotions.

Charming Christmas Bazaar at Aqua Windie's



EAGLE BEACH -- A charming private initiative brought together many of the island's artisans, makers of hand-crafts, cookie and pie bakers, ponche-crema specialists, junk artists and decorators for a Christmas



Bazaar benefitting the Red Cross of Aruba. The Christmas Bazaar took place on Saturday at Aqua Windie's and was also supported by Super Food. Pictures here the fun items on sale, including two puppy



dogs looking for a new home, the artisans with their creations and the clients with their finds. Make sure you don't miss the excitement next year, organized by Hariette and friends. □



Amazonia Churrascaria Entertains Wema Ponton



PALM BEACH – The hard over dinner at Amazonia the store to stock up on working crew of Wema Churrascaria. They will useful holiday gifts, and Ponton got an early start be busy later in the month, decided to celebrate with on the holiday season when shopper descend on friends and colleagues, at

Goodwill Ambassadors Mr. & Mrs. Tenenbaum at The Aruba Marriott



PALM BEACH - At the Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino, Mr. Jerry and Mrs. Phyllis Tenenbaum were acknowledged with the "Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba" title by the Aruba Tourism Authority. Goodwill Ambassadors are loyal Aruba visitors who have visited Aruba for 20 consecutive years or more.

Their first visit to Aruba was in 1985, when Aruba was still in the developing stage as to what it has become now. The warmth and friendliness of the people, great weather, and the beautiful beaches are just a few of the many

reasons that make them come back each time. With the passion for traveling to Aruba yearly, Mr. and Mrs. Tenenbaum stay more than two weeks divided over the Aruba Marriott Resort and Marriott Aruba Ocean Club. The honoring took place at the newly transformed lobby of the Marriott Ocean Club. Present at this special occasion were: ATA representative Castro Perez, Executive Secretary Gail Sahit and Sales & Marketing Coordinator Keirsin Tjon Pian Gi. The honorees were presented with a commemorative plaque by Castro Perez of ATA. □



the beginning of December. This year Amazonia Churrascaria is offering several, very attractive Holiday Menus, for every pocket and every taste, beginning with just Awg 65 per person, inclusive. Santa's Special for a minimum of 10 guests includes the restaurant's famous salad bar, and a plentiful meat selection escorted by side dishes,

while Rudolph's Special for Awg 80 per person, also includes dessert, which are absolutely fabulous at Amazonia Churrascaria. Great food quality and genuine, warm hospitality make Amazonia Churrascaria a favorite all year long but the customized holiday selections make the restaurant especially appealing for year-end celebrations. □





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HUMAN HINTS

The Initial Arrogance of Enlightenment

Discovering enlightenment often seems very empowering at first. Finding a part of the illusive answer you've been seeking can be an ecstatic experience, and ecstasy can blind us to the perils surrounding us as we embark on an unfamiliar path.

At first it's natural to become arrogant. If we each create our own reality, we can't really hurt anyone else. We each create our own pain, so if we hurt someone, they created the experience of us hurting them. The bottom line, when taken literally, is that this is true.

It sure seems like there's cause and effect in the physical world, so if we go around hurting other people because we're not responsible for their pain, we might open our selves to random attack.

If you want respect, you feel it and show it to others. If you hurt other people, you invite other people to hurt you. New age jargon makes it so easy to remove responsibility from our actions, and to place it on others. In the beginning, its natural to become self-righteous while we watch everyone we know wallow in the misery they've created for them selves.

If we're lucky, the Universe will eventually provide us with our own personal humbling experiences to balance our dangerous, blinding arrogance.

Until Tomorrow.

Go to www.HumanHints.com to sign up to receive this column in your email each day.

~Quentin Danziger

Quentin has over 20 years experience balancing what we refer to as the Real World, with science and spirit. He has held positions of responsibility and authority, received a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Physics from Colorado School of Mines, and has studied many avenues of alternative thought. HumanHints is the culmination of his knowledge, experience and practice. These free daily emails detail concrete, real-world techniques to consciously create any future you chose, while in the throes of daily life created by outdated modes of thought.

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Bernanke's bold QE2 finally explained -- with burgers and fries

By Paul McDonnold

Dallas, Texas – I am standing in line at the Burger Barn, wondering what the effect of the Federal Reserve's plan to pump \$600 billion into the US economy will be (an economics education makes one do strange things). The move, dubbed quantitative easing 2, or QE2, aims to spur economic recovery. Can it really do that? What is so special about all those dollars compared to the five I hold in my hand?

To get an idea, I imagine the future path of the money I am about to hand to the cashier. The course of my cash The first place it goes is into the Barn's cash register. From there it is counted into a snug zippered pouch and taken to the local branch of the First Huge Bank for deposit into the Barn's checking account.

Five Guys Burgers: Are they on your list of Top 5 burgers? Here something strange happens. The five-dollar bill that was in my pocket is pigeonholed into a teller drawer. It waits to be handed out to some random customer and taken back into the swirl of physical currency. But as I see it, my five dollars is still in the checking account of the Burger Barn. It has simply lost its physical body, gone virtual. It now exists as pulses across an electronic network, and as an idea. That idea resides not only in Burger Barn's checking account, but also as an asset in the balance sheet of the First Huge Bank, Inc., where it piles up with other people's ideas of deposits to form a huge mountain of virtual cash.

Some of that cash might be from QE2. When the Federal Reserve buys government bonds in a program like QE2, it pays for them with newly created money that goes into the account of the US Treasury. The money is then available to the US government to pay its many expenses, from road construction to Medicare bills to, perhaps, the salary of a Marine private who deposits his paycheck in the First Huge Bank.

Let's say First Huge passes mine and the Marine's QE2 dollars, along with many others, to Mega-Multinational Corporation in the form of a short-term commercial loan. My dollars may be destined for Shanghai At this point Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke rubs his hands together expectantly. This is where policy rubber meets the road. The hope is that Mega-Multinational will build new offices, stores, and factories in the US, hiring workers to staff them and helping bring down the unemployment rate. And with some of the money, something like that may happen. But the economy today is global. Dollar bills, especially the virtual kind, can travel the planet like the Star Trek crew, beaming into and out of wherever the action is deemed to be.

With annual economic growth rates as high as our unemployment rates, China has plenty of action. So Mega-Multinational may well decide that the best investment is to send my five dollars along with the Marine private's QE2 money across the sea to construct a new office park in Shanghai. Very quickly, my cash for a burger has been converted into Chinese currency, entering one of the fastest-growing economies on the planet.

The destination of my five dollars may disappoint Mr. Bernanke and others who'd like to see greater activity right here in America. But it reveals an important truth about economic performance: sustainable growth springs from enterprise that's fueled by savings – not a faster currency printing press.

QE2 can't make Americans work – or save – more China's growth is built on bottom-up productivity – not top-down bond buying. The Chinese people are thrifty and hard working. Released from the yoke of true communism a generation ago, they are extraordinarily entrepreneurial. They seem to have figured out that the alchemy for success is an

unusual mixture of boldness and humility – the boldness to imagine the future and the humility to work and sacrifice to achieve it.

Back in the US, we are impatient. We seek comfort. We consume instead of save, buy rather than build. Our forebears did the heavy lifting to put our economy on top of the world. Can't we just reap the rewards – a great job for life, a big house filled with the latest entertainment devices, three cars in the garage? Can't QE2 just give us that?

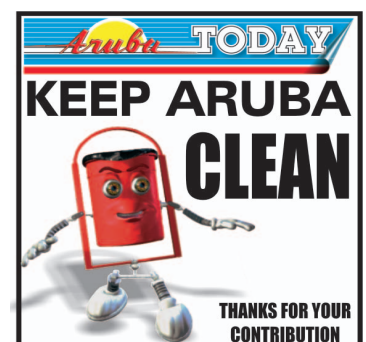
RELATED: Instead of stimulus, do nothing – seriously

It can't, because by itself the \$600 billion it represents is, like my five dollars, insubstantial and ghostlike.

Now if QE2 money inspires American business leaders to take a chance on expanding operations and hiring new people, it might lower unemployment. If it inspires discouraged workers to go out and pound the pavement for available jobs, it might increase the goods and services our economy produces. On the other hand, if it inspires us to spend more time arguing about ideology and blaming policies for our predicament, QE2 will merely increase our debt and push our economy further out of balance.

In the end, our economic success is less about our policies and more about ourselves. And that is something to be glad about. Now where's my burger?

Paul McDonnold is the author of "The Economics of Ego Surplus," a novel of economic terrorism. He has taught economics courses at the University of North Texas, the University of Delaware, and North Lake College in Irving, Texas. □





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After setback, U.S. resumes Mideast peace push

JOSEF FEDERMAN

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) —

The U.S. Mideast envoy returned to the region on Monday, seeking to revive troubled peace efforts after a major setback in which Washington abandoned efforts to coax Israel to freeze Jewish settlement in areas Palestinians want for a future state.

The envoy, George Mitchell, was expected to push the Israelis and Palestinians for progress on key issues at the heart of their conflict. But in a reflection of the difficulties ahead, Mitchell was being forced to meet separately with the sides during the two-day visit, and expectations for a breakthrough were low. The failure to halt Israeli settlement construction has left President Barack Obama's signature peace effort in embarrassing limbo.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the U.S. decision, saying efforts should instead focus on what he called the major issues in the conflict. "To reach peace, (the sides) must discuss the issues that truly hold up peace," he told a business conference. "I am glad we will begin discussing these issues. We will narrow gaps, and when these gaps are narrowed, we will proceed to direct talks whose objective will be to reach a blueprint for peace." Netanyahu spoke ahead of his meeting with Mitchell. Obama personally launched

direct negotiations with great fanfare at a White House ceremony on Sept. 2, pledging to broker an agreement to end one of the world's most intractable conflicts within a year. Just three weeks later, that effort collapsed with the end of an earlier Israeli slowdown on settlement construction.

The Palestinians view Israel's continued construction in the West Bank and east Jerusalem — areas they claim for a future, independent state — as a sign of bad faith, and say there is no point in negotiating directly without a freeze. About half a million settlers have moved to the West Bank and east Jerusalem since Israel captured them in the 1967 Mideast war.

Frustrated with the lack of progress, the Palestinians have begun to explore an alternative. They are trying to rally international recognition for a state based on the 1967 boundaries — with or without agreement with Israel. While this would not change the situation on the ground immediately, it would isolate Israel internationally and put heavy pressure for a compromise.

Brazil and Argentina recognized Palestine in recent days.

In Brussels Monday, European Union foreign ministers said they would recognize a Palestinian state "when appropriate," emphasizing the need for a negotiated settlement.



U.S. Mideast envoy George Mitchell, left, listens to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during their meeting in Jerusalem, Monday, Dec. 13, 2010. Mitchell returned to the region on Monday, seeking to revive troubled peace efforts after a major setback in which Washington abandoned efforts to coax a settlement freeze from Israel.

Officials said a significant number of member states favor a unilateral declaration of independence for Palestine if the peace process remains stalled. They say leaders will discuss the issue at a summit this week. The foreign ministers also said they regretted that Israel had not renewed its settlement freeze.

The U.S. spent the past two months trying to persuade Israel to renew the building moratorium, offering a package of military assistance and diplomatic protection at the United Nations.

But last week, American officials said they were abandoning the effort because Israel refused to include east Jerusalem in any freeze and because of uncertainty over what would happen at the end of the proposed 90-day period. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed frustration with both sides in a speech Friday, even while insisting the U.S. will keep pressing for a solution. Yet she offered few details on how the Americans hope to break the impasse. Mitchell met Netanyahu late Monday and officials

close to the Israeli leader said they were hoping to hear the envoy's ideas on how to move forward.

Clinton has said she wants to push the parties to address "core issues" that have repeatedly scuttled two decades of peace efforts: the final borders between Israel and a future Palestine, the fate of millions of Palestinian refugees displaced as a result of Israel's creation in 1948, and resolving the disputing claims to east Jerusalem, home to sensitive Jewish, Muslim and Christian holy sites. □



Iran's president abruptly fires foreign minister



In this Tuesday July, 29, 2008 file photo, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, right, listens to his Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, during the inaugural ceremony of the 15th Non-Aligned Movement Foreign Ministerial meeting, in Tehran, Iran.

ALI AKBAR DAREINI BRIAN MURPHY
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's president abruptly fired his foreign minister Monday and named the nuclear chief as acting top diplomat, the latest sign of a rift at the top levels of the Islamic theocracy as the country faces intense pressure from the West over its nuclear program.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gave no explanation for the change in a

Associated Press brief statement on his website. But the fired diplomat, Manouchehr Mottaki, is seen as close to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. And the president may be aiming to install a figure more personally loyal to himself as Tehran resumes critical talks with world powers over the nuclear program that has brought four rounds of U.N. sanctions on Iran.

The nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, is one of Ahmadinejad's 12 vice presidents.

"This move shows not only the internal tensions but the primacy of the nuclear issue as Iran's main foreign policy objective," said Rasool Nafisi, an expert on Iranian affairs at Strayer University in Virginia. Just a week before the shake-up, Iran resumed negotiations with six world powers over its suspect nuclear program after a long hiatus and another round is planned for early next year. Four sets of U.N. sanctions appear to be biting into the Iranian economy and Ahmadinejad may be looking for a loyal foreign minister who will help him clinch a deal with the six powers to ease the punitive measures. Mottaki, foreign minister since 2005, was fired in the middle of a tour of African nations that took him to Senegal, where he delivered a message from Ahmadinejad to the West African nation's leaders on Monday, according to the official IRNA news agency. Mottaki made no immediate public comment on his dismissal.

A fourth round of sanctions was imposed in June over

Iran's refusal to halt uranium enrichment, a key part of its nuclear program that is of international concern because it can be used both for making reactor fuel and atomic weapons. Iran insists its aims are entirely peaceful, but the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency says its years of investigating have not been able to confirm that.

The sanctions are making it more difficult for Iran to trade with the outside world.

The president of Iran's chamber of commerce, Mohammad Nahavandian, said last month that import prices for most goods have risen by 15 to 30 percent because of sanctions. That is because companies, particularly Asian firms, are bumping up prices because they know Iran is now a desperate market and insurance is difficult — if not impossible — to obtain on shipments to Iran.

And many European firms avoid dealings with Iran or their banks refrain from transactions with Iran.

Some of the tensions between Ahmadinejad and Mottaki

have spilled out into public in this closely guarded nation.

In the past year, Mottaki opposed a decision by Ahmadinejad to appoint his own special foreign envoys to key areas such as the Middle East, Afghanistan and the Caspian Sea region. Mottaki found the appointments embarrassing to the Foreign Ministry and allegedly took his complaint to the supreme leader. Khamenei has final say in all state matters in Iran. He also runs the nuclear program and stands at the top of the clerical leadership that rules the country.

Khamenei reportedly sided with Mottaki, forcing Ahmadinejad to moderate his position and change their title only to the level of advisers.

The difference was exposed in September when Mottaki publicly attacked Mohammad Baghaei, one of the four trusted foreign policy envoys appointed by Ahmadinejad, calling him an "inexperienced" figure who was "creating problems for the country's foreign policy." □

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PRESCHOOLERS

Continued from Front Page

"The hostage-taking is over," an aide to the mayor of the eastern French city of Besancon, Jean-Marc Magda, told The Associated Press by telephone. All 20 children who had been seized and their teacher were released safely, he said.

The hostage-taker, allegedly suffering from depression and asking for a gun to kill himself, was detained by police officers from the elite GIPN force, who slipped into the school as the children were being brought lunch, Education Minister Luc Chatel said.

He was first neutralized with a shot from an electric pistol, said Laurent Gresset, regional chief of the Alliance police union.

"We brought in meals, and it was at that moment that the GIPN was able to intervene, separate the children, free them and apprehend the hostage-taker," Chatel said in televised comments from the scene after the four-hour-long ordeal.

French television showed a wide-eyed girl being draped in a green blanket and carried away from the school. Police and worried families had surrounded the Charles Fourier preschool in Planoise, a neighborhood of housing projects with a big immigrant population on the western edge of Besancon.

The hostage-taker, known in the neighborhood, had allowed groups of children to leave during the ordeal. Applause erupted as the last five were led from the school after the police

intervention.

Reports of the arms wielded by the hostage-taker varied, but Chatel said he carried "two long knives." He said the hostage-taker had wanted to kill himself "in the classroom."

"It was he (the hostage-taker) who contacted police ... He asked several times for a weapon to kill himself," Chatel said on France-Info radio, apparently referring to a gun. "Beyond that, he expressed no violence toward the children."

Described by officials as depressive, the teen appeared to be gentle with his preschool hostages.

He never threatened the children, even allowing them to go to the bathroom, Chatel said. Several parents interviewed on French television said their children seemed unaware of the gravity of the drama, and many colored to pass the time. Besancon Mayor Jean-Louis Fousseret said the teen had been treated for depression, but had not taken his medication in recent days.

"From the start, police understood he wanted to hurt himself more than the children and the teacher," said Gresset.

Police talked with the young man throughout the ordeal "so he would turn himself in peacefully and not kill himself."

The hostage-taker initially seized a class of 20 children but released at least 14 throughout the morning, including one who "more or less escaped," Fousseret said.

Five children and the teacher were still in the preschool when the officers entered at lunchtime, he said on i-tele television. □

Bhutanese refugees leaving Nepal passes 40,000

BINAJ GURUBACHARYA

Associated Press

KATMANDU, Nepal (AP)

— A campaign to resettle ethnic Nepalese forced out of Bhutan two decades ago has found homes for 40,000 refugees in Western countries, although tens of thousands continue to wait, an official said Monday.

More than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese — a Hindu minority in Bhutan for centuries — were forced out of Bhutan in the early 1990s by authorities who wanted to impose the country's dominant Buddhist culture. They have lived as refugees in Nepal ever since.

The United Nations — with the help of the United States and other countries — set up the resettlement program in July 2007. More than 60,000 refugees originally signed up, while the rest said they preferred

to wait in camps or try to return to Bhutan. The first refugees began leaving Nepal in November 2007 and they have resettled in the U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.

The 40,000th refugee was to leave Nepal on Monday, and 50,000 others have now applied, said Stephen Jaquemet, a U.N. refugee agency official.

More than 34,000 refugees have relocated to the United States, said Scott DeLisi, the U.S. ambassador to Nepal. He said the U.S. is willing to take in a large portion of the 50,000 new applicants. Bhutan refuses to allow the refugees to return, saying most left voluntarily and renounced their citizenship. Nepal — worried about the cost of integrating them into society — has refused



Bhutanese refugees wait to leave for resettlement abroad at a transit facility of International Organization for Migration in Katmandu, Nepal, Monday, Dec. 13, 2010. A 3-year-old program to resettle ethnic Nepalese forced out of Bhutan in the early 1990s has found homes for 40,000 of the refugees in Western countries, and 50,000 more have applied.

Associated Press

to offer them citizenship. Relations between Nepal and Bhutan have been strained over the issue.

Several rounds of talks were held over the last two decades, but no significant progress was made.

The refugees have lived in seven U.N.-run camps about 310 miles east of the capital, Katmandu. □

Catch your own dinner with Driftwood!

Motto at Driftwood Restaurant: "From the pier to your plate!"

ORANJESTAD - The downtown marina is home of Driftwood Fishing Charters, the successful fishermen of the established seafood restaurant Driftwood in Oranjestad.

Driftwood owner Herby Merryweather has a love and passion for fishing. A fisherman who knows about fish, what our local waters have to offer, and what the words



"fresh seafood" really mean. What Herby catches will be served in his restaurant on

the same day. Herby loves to share his fishing passion with the many visitors to the island. His fleet of a 35 ft. Twin Engine Bertram yacht and a 50 ft. Twin Engine Post yacht, appropriately called "Driftwood I and II, is available for charters on a daily basis from 8am to

Catch your own dinner

12 noon and from 1pm to 5pm. A charter includes: captain, mate, all fishing equipment, bait, sodas and bottled water. On a full day charter sandwiches and snacks are also included. You can call Herby directly at (297) 592 4040 or go to www.driftwoodaruba.com.

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This authentic Aruban seafood restaurant is located in characteristic downtown Oranjestad. Their extended

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Driftwood Restaurant

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www.driftwoodaruba.com

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More than just the best pizza on the island...

Casa Tua's highlight of the day: Ossobuco that melts in your mouth

PALM BEACH - Located on Palm Beach in the Arawak Gardens, Casa Tua presents a fresh under-the-stars approach to dining in Aruba. The outdoor atmosphere is cool and relaxed; the name says it all "Casa Tua" meaning "Your Home" in Italian.

The menu varies with a wide array of Italian dishes including a Sicilian-style thin crust pizza dripping with cheese, fresh-made tomato sauce and a variety of toppings in the meat, seafood and veggie categories.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT of the menu is the *Ossobuco di Vitello con Tagliatelle* which is a mouth watering Veal Ossobuco (shank) stewed with red wine, parsley, Rosemary, oregano, onions and lemon juice served with the most unique Tagliatelle. After the first bite, patrons are seen pinching themselves to see if they are dreaming or actually taking a true bite of seventh heaven.

The menu doesn't stop there as Casa Tua features incredible appetizers including shrimp



bruschetta, fresh marinated seafood, escargots, amazing salads, homemade soups starting at \$8 and authentic Italian lasagnas & pastas starting at just \$13. The staff at this popular eatery has set the standard on the island for the term "great service" not only with your dining pleasure, but recognized as 'the' professionals in assisting guests with the perfect cocktail, paired wine or other beverages.

After just one dinner at Casa Tua, you'll know your home in this family owned eatery. Of course we saved the best for last as no one does an ending better than Casa Tua with their dreamy Tiramisu, or Profiteroles au Chocolat Chaud.

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the world are found back on the menu and they are already well known for the daily changing specials. If you have a large party, or if there is anything you feel like in particular, Fishes & More can always arrange to have your dinner cooked just for you, as they work

only with fresh and honest products!

Ideally located in front of the Occidental Resort (Former Allegro), they are visited both by individuals and families alike, as they have a super kids menu, so they can enjoy their dinner as much as you

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Concussions in NFL up 21 percent from last season

By HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Pro Football Writer

Concussions are being reported at a much higher rate in the NFL this season, which the league considers evidence that players and teams are taking head injuries more seriously.

According to NFL data obtained by The Associated Press, 154 concussions that happened in practices or games were reported from the start of the preseason through the eighth week of the 2010 regular season.

That is an increase of 21 percent over the 127 concussions through the eighth week of the 2009 season, and a 34 percent jump from the 115 reported over the same span in 2008.

Dr. Hunt Batjer of Northwestern University, co-chairman of the NFL's head, neck and spine medical committee, called the numbers "a great sign."

"Based on the opinions of the trainers and the team physicians and everyone we communicate with, it appears to be a cultural change," Batjer said in an interview with the AP.

"We're trying to make sure that players have the message: Playing through pain is good; playing through pain is what sports are about. But that's leg pain. That's arm pain. Not brain injury," Batjer said. "Because a brain injury and spine injury can threaten their future."

Concussions continue to be a hot-button issue for the league and its players. Batjer's committee met for two days in New York last week to gather information about improving player safety and consider steps to take moving forward; the union's traumatic brain injury committee is convening Monday and Tuesday in Washington.

Continued on Next Page

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STREAK ENDS

Shoulder injury stops Brett Favre

Minnesota Vikings quarterback Brett Favre looks down during warmups at Ford Field before their NFL football game against the New York Giants in Detroit, Monday, Dec. 13, 2010. Favre is inactive for the game with the Giants, ending his record consecutive starts streak at 297, dating back to 1992.

*Associated Press
Page B3*

CONCUSSIONS*Continued from Page B1*

And every week, it seems, key players miss time because of head injuries. Arizona Cardinals quarterback Derek Anderson and Pittsburgh Steelers tight end Heath Miller, for example, sat out Sunday with concussions, while Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers left in the first half of Green Bay's 7-3 loss to the Detroit Lions.

Rodgers was slow getting up after being hit by two Lions at the end of a scramble. After Green Bay took a timeout, Rodgers was sacked on the next play. He stayed in for the rest of the drive but then exited.

"He was a little groggy after those two plays, and the medical staff and Aaron decided it was in his best interest not to go back in," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said.

The NFL has been working to get across Batjer's point about thinking of head

injuries differently from other health problems, hoping that players will not only be more vigilant about reporting their own symptoms but also about keeping an eye out for teammates who might have a concussion.

Thirty of 160 NFL players surveyed by the AP in November 2009 replied that they have hidden or played down the effects of a concussion.

"That's one good thing (Commissioner) Roger Goodell and the NFL have been doing: The message is that if there's something wrong with a guy, especially a head injury, you don't want to rush a guy back or make a little mistake that could mess him up, possibly for life," New York Jets safety Brodney Pool said.

"I think they've been doing a good job of getting things under control and making it harder for guys to get out there," Pool said. "I mean, this is the guys' passion, and you



Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers (12) is hit by Detroit Lions linebacker Landon Johnson in the first half of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 12, 2010 in Detroit. Rodgers left the game and did not return. The Lions defeated the Packers 7-3.

Associated Press

want to go out there. You can say, 'Nah, nothing's wrong with me,' but deep down inside, you know something's wrong."

In December 2009, the NFL set up new rules for checking players on the sideline during a game to determine whether they have a concussion or can get back on the field. Last

week, Batjer's committee discussed adopting a league-wide exam so each team would perform the same tests on a player who might have a head injury.

"A couple of team doctors mentioned to me that players in the past would have gone back in had it not been for our return-to-play guidelines.

That's a positive thing," Goodell said. "But one of the things we've got to do is make sure there's an awareness out there, so that when a player gets an injury, they report the injury to our medical professionals so they can be evaluated and those determinations can be made from a medical standpoint." □

Rogge: IOC can sanction members for past cases

By GRAHAM DUNBAR

AP Sports Writer

MIES, Switzerland — The IOC says an inquiry prompted by FIFA corruption allegations can seek sanctions against members implicated in wrongdoing before they joined the Olympic body.

The International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge said Monday that the organization has strict ethics rules for dealing with any member who "has become tainted" after past allegations are proven.

"The whole issue is about the reputation of the IOC potentially being tainted if facts are proven for a person that was not an IOC member at that time," Rogge said.

The IOC ethics commission asked the BBC two weeks ago to pass on evidence aired in a TV documentary alleging that African soccer president Issa Hayatou took a kickback from FIFA's former marketing agency in 1995.

Hayatou became an IOC member in 2001. The Cameroonian official declined to be interviewed for the BBC's "Panorama" program. The day after the broadcast, Hayatou said the payment of about \$20,000 was a donation to the African Football Confederation. "We have asked for clarification from the BBC and then the ethics commission will look into the matter, and will then decide which persons

have to be investigated," Rogge said.

The IOC president did not confirm which members are involved, citing the need to "respect the total autonomy and confidentiality of the work of the ethics commission."

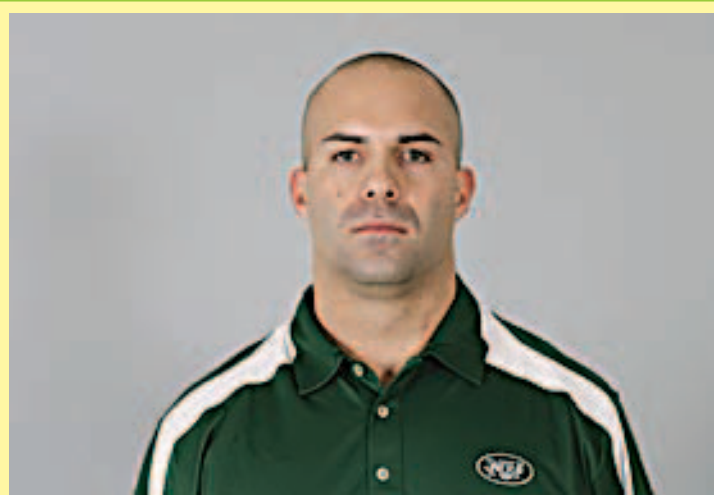
The BBC investigation also alleged that secret payments were received by former FIFA president Joao Havelange. The 94-year-old Brazilian is the longest-serving IOC member with 47 years in the movement.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter, who joined the IOC in 1999, was not accused by the BBC of receiving kickbacks.

Rogge said Monday that Blatter kept him informed in recent weeks as FIFA dealt with accusations of bribe-taking and vote-rigging in the process of choosing hosts for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

Two voters from FIFA's executive committee, plus four past members, were suspended from all soccer duties by its ethics court, which was created in 2006 in the image of the IOC's own ethics body.

FIFA refused to open its own ethics probe into the BBC allegations, saying a Swiss criminal court dealt with the matter when executives from the marketing agency went on trial two years ago. They were cleared of most fraud charges relating to the agency's financial collapse in 2001. □



This photo taken in 2009 shows the New York Jets' strength and conditioning coach Sal Alosi. Alosi tripped a Miami Dolphins player on the sideline during a game Sunday.

Jets assistant suspended, fined \$25K for tripping

DENNIS WASZAK Jr.

AP Sports Writer

FLORHAM PARK, New Jersey (AP) — The New York Jets assistant coach who tripped a Miami Dolphins player during a game has been suspended without pay for the rest of the season, including the playoffs, and fined an additional \$25,000.

Sal Alosi, the Jets' strength and conditioning coach, will begin serving his suspension immediately and have no access to the team's practice facility.

General manager Mike Tannenbaum says Monday that Alosi will also not be allowed to interact with any players or coaches "as it pertains to his job function."

Tannenbaum says the team spoke with the NFL about the incident throughout the day, and the league will issue no further discipline. Alosi said earlier in the day that his "actions were inexcusable and irresponsible." □

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Brett Favre inactive, streak ends at 297 starts

NOAH TRISTER,

AP Sports Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Brett Favre's record consecutive starts streak ended at 297 on Monday when he did not run out for the Minnesota Vikings' game against the New York Giants.

The streak, dating back to 1992, ended because of a right shoulder injury the quarterback sustained in Minnesota's Dec. 5 win against Buffalo.

Jeff Anderson, a Vikings spokesman, announced to the public that the 41-year-old Favre was inactive via Twitter: "Vikings Inactives — 12, 19, 25, 31, 76, 90, 91...and 4. The streak ends..."

The Vikings hoped Favre, who has started despite a broken foot and elbow tendinitis this season, could do it again when the Giants game was delayed from Sunday after the Metrodome roof collapsed. That forced the game to be moved to Ford Field, but it was not enough time for Favre to recover.

The quarterback was injured when the Bills' Arthur Moats hit him square in the back and sent him to the turf on the third play from scrimmage.

The day after, the rookie linebacker said he had mixed emotions about perhaps being the player who ended Favre's streak.

"I don't want to see anybody hurting and not playing any more. If he plays, that would be a good thing," Moats said.

"But if he doesn't, and I was the guy to end the streak, all right. That's a little notable, yeah."

For some, it was hard to fathom. Cardinals receiver Larry Fitzgerald tweeted: "Even after the reports about Brett Favre being inactive I STILL won't believe that he's not playing until I see it w/ my own eyes!"

Tarvaris Jackson will start for Minnesota, which at 5-7 is a long shot to make the playoffs.

Season No. 20 has been one of Favre's toughest. He's taken a beating on the field and played not only through two fractures in his left foot and elbow tendinitis but 10 stitches in his chin along with aches in his neck, back and calf before he was crunched by Moats.

Favre has thrown a league-high 18 interceptions and his 69.6 QB rating is 29th in the league.

He's also been the subject of an NFL investigation into allegations he sent inappropriate messages and photos to a game-day hostess when both worked for the New York Jets in 2008. The investigation has lasted for more than two

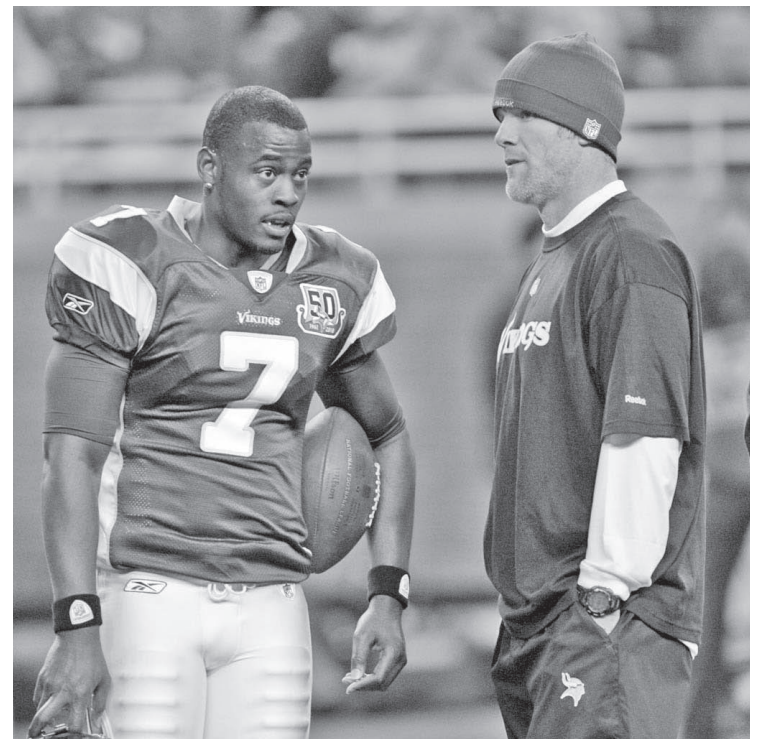
months now, and the lawyer for Jenn Sterger was vocal last week in trying to get a ruling announced.

Through it all, Favre has led his team on the field, extending his streak further and further. Colts quarterback Peyton Manning now holds the longest active streak at 205 games. He would need to keep it going for another 5½ years to surpass Favre.

"It's beyond reason. It's ridiculous," said Seahawks quarterback Matt Hasselbeck, who backed up Favre in Green Bay years ago. "He's gotten lucky a little bit too, but he's just the toughest guy in the world." It's a record that Favre cherishes.

"I far exceeded my goals," Favre said last week. "I don't know if any player comes in and says, 'Hey, I have a goal of playing 300 straight games.' To have done that with playoffs (321 games), I don't know how many consecutive starts, it's a lot, and had it ended several weeks before or last year, it is still quite an accomplishment."

He's been listed as questionable on the injury



Minnesota Vikings starting quarterback Tarvaris Jackson (7) talks with injured quarterback Brett Favre before an NFL football game against the New York Giants Monday, Dec. 13, 2010 in Detroit. Favre is inactive for the game with Giants, ending his record consecutive starts streak at 297, dating back to 1992. The game is being played in Detroit due to the collapse of the Metrodome roof on Sunday.

Associated Press

report heading into a game several times this season. But it was clear as soon as Moats blindsided him that this injury was more serious. Favre's injury, a sprained SC joint, is a rarity in sports, one that doctors say occurs most often when a person's body slams against the steering wheel in an auto accident. Favre said Wednesday he

was having difficulty putting on a shirt or pulling on socks and he did not throw a proper pass all week in preparation for the Giants.

Both Favre and interim coach Leslie Frazier were adamant he would not be given a ceremonial start — one or two snaps at the beginning of the game — to keep the streak going. □

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NBA Roundup

Streaks alive for Knicks, Stoudemire

NEW YORK (AP) — Amare Stoudemire scored 24 of his 30 points in the second half and Wilson Chandler made the tiebreaking 3-pointer with 30 seconds left as the New York Knicks beat the Denver Nuggets 129-125 on Sunday for their first eight-game winning streak in 16 years. Stoudemire set a franchise record with his eighth straight 30-point game.

Winning for the 13th time in 14 games, the Knicks have won eight straight for the first time since Dec. 27, 1994-Jan. 13, 1995. At 16-9, they are off to their best start after 25 games since they were 18-7 in 1996-97.

Chandler scored 27 points, and Raymond Felton had 19 points and a season-high 17 assists. Rookie Landry Fields scored 18 points and Danilo Gallinari had 16 for the Knicks.

Carmelo Anthony had 31 points and 13 rebounds in his return to the Nuggets' lineup after missing two games with an inflamed right knee. Nene added 26 points.

Lakers 99, Nets 92

At Newark, New Jersey, Kobe Bryant scored 25 of his 32 points in the second half and had two big assists in a late 8-0 run that led Los Angeles to its eighth straight win over New Jersey.

Lamar Odom had five of his 22 points in the late spurt and Pau Gasol had the other three in capping a 15-point, 11-rebound effort for the Lakers.

Brook Lopez had 25 points and nine rebounds for the Nets, who have lost seven straight and 9 of 11. Devin Harris added 16 points and 10 assists.

Spurs 95, Trail Blazers 78

At San Antonio, George Hill scored 22 points as San Antonio won its fifth straight to become the NBA's first 20-game winner this season.

Manu Ginobili added 18 points and Tim Duncan had eight points and 13 rebounds in his 1,000th NBA game.

Wesley Matthews scored 17 points, while Brandon Roy was hassled into a 4-of-16 shooting performance and had only nine as Portland snapped a four-game win streak.

76ers 88, Hornets 70

At Philadelphia, Andre Iguodala and Lou Williams sparked a 17-2 run spanning the first and second quarters that catapulted Philadelphia to its fifth win in seven games.

Williams finished with 17 points, Elton Brand had 15 points and 13 rebounds for his eighth double-double of the season, and Iguodala had 16 points and 10 assists.

Chris Paul scored 25 points and David West was held to just nine on 2-of-10 shooting for New Orleans, which lost for the eighth time in 11 games.

Magic 94, Clippers 85

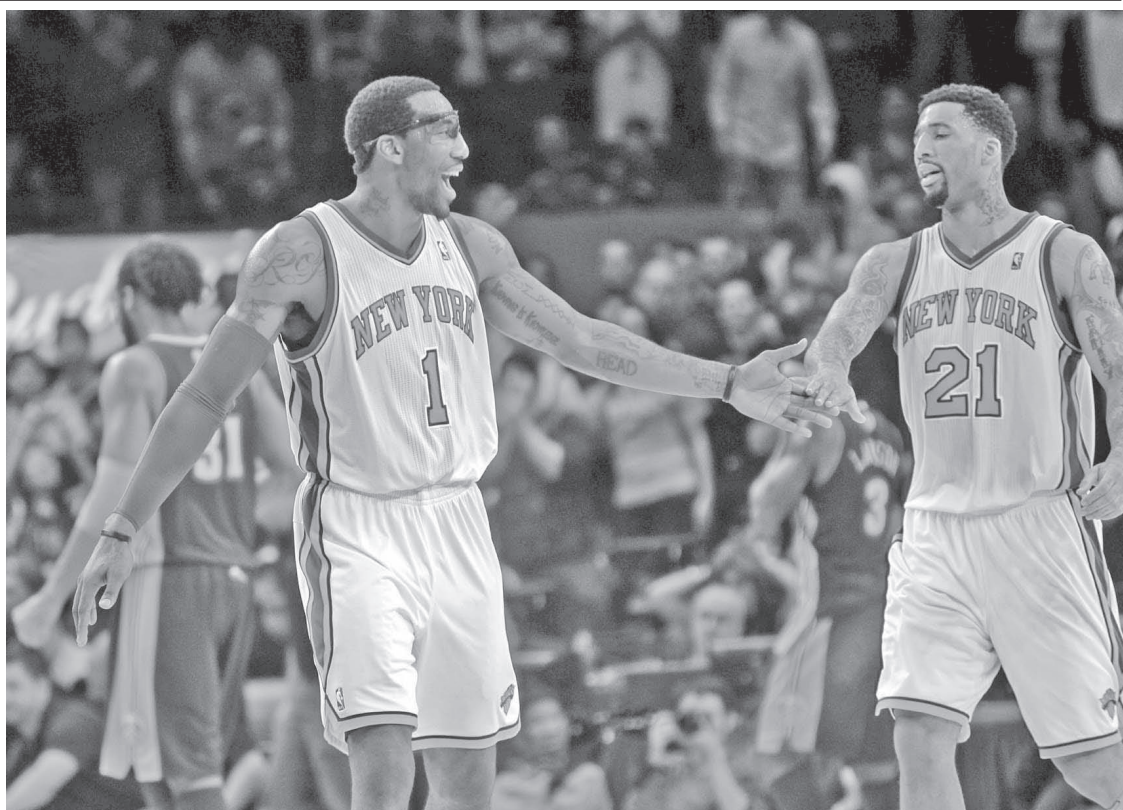
At Los Angeles, Dwight Howard scored 22 points to help Orlando beat the Los Angeles Clippers and end a four-game losing streak.

Jameer Nelson added 17 points, Vince Carter 13, and Brandon Bass had 13 points and a career high-tying 11 rebounds for his first double-double of the season.

Blake Griffin had 27 points and 16 rebounds for his 18th double-double, and Eric Gordon scored 28 points for the Clippers, who lost for the eighth time in a row to Orlando.

Thunder 106, Cavaliers 77

At Oklahoma City, Kevin



New York Knicks' Amare Stoudemire (1) celebrates with teammate Wilson Chandler (21) after Knicks' Raymond Felton, not pictured, scored during the second half of the NBA basketball game against the Denver Nuggets in New York, Sunday, Dec. 12, 2010. Stoudemire had his eighth consecutive 30-point game and the Knicks beat the Nuggets 129-125.

Associated Press

Durant scored 25 points, and Jeff Green and James Harden added 19 apiece as Oklahoma City send Cleveland to its eighth straight loss.

The Cavaliers fought back from a 22-point, first-half deficit to briefly get within nine. But Oklahoma City

closed the third quarter on a 19-1 run and stretched its lead to 30 in the fourth.

Anthony Parker led Cleveland with 12 points and Daniel Gibson scored 11 and Anderson Varejao had a season-high 16 rebounds.

In other NBA games it was

New York 129, Denver 125; Philadelphia 88, New Orleans 70; L.A. Lakers 99, New Jersey 92; San Antonio 95, Portland 78; Oklahoma City 106, Cleveland 77; and Orlando 94, L.A. Clippers 85. □

Governor, mayor confident Hornets staying in La.

By BRETT MARTEL

AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS — A potential Louisiana-based ownership group for the New Orleans Hornets is taking shape, and Gov. Bobby Jindal and Mayor Mitch Landrieu said Monday they are confident that Louisiana will be able to keep its NBA franchise.

“The big message is: The future of the Hornets in the City of New Orleans is in our hands,” Landrieu said.

Landrieu and Jindal met in downtown New Orleans, along with regional politicians, business leaders and the heads of economic development groups and chambers of commerce to discuss the future of the franchise that majority owner George Shinn is selling to the league. Even James Carville and Mary Matalin, the celebrity political strategists who call New Orleans home, showed up to lend support.

Although there is little to stop the NBA from selling the club to new owners who want to move the team, league Commissioner David Stern has said that the goal is to try first to identify buyers who could help the team stay in the historic city that the NBA has taken

an active role in rebuilding since Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005.

“We’ve got a number of business leaders that are more than willing to step up to the plate and help put a coalition together to buy the team and keep them in New Orleans,” Jindal said. “I’m not worried about other communities or other potential purchasers at this point.”

Among potential new owners at the meeting was Morris Bart, a local attorney who said he is willing to buy 10 percent of the team and added that outgoing minority owner Gary Chouest told him he is willing to buy back in for more than 50 percent.

Chouest, whose Louisiana-based business builds, operates and leases supply vessels to the offshore energy industry around the world, owns 35 percent of the team, which he is selling to the NBA after his negotiations to buy out Shinn fell through.

Chouest has declined to explain why negotiations with Shinn broke down, but still has his courtside seats next to the Hornets' bench and said last week that remains interested in doing what he can to keep the team from moving. □

NHL Roundup

Rangers rout frustrated Ovechkin and Capitals, 7-0

NEW YORK (AP) — Artem Anisimov scored the first of three Rangers goals during a 3 1/2-minute span early in the second period as New York routed a frustrated Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals 7-0 on Sunday.

Henrik Lundqvist made 31 saves in his fifth shutout this season and Ryan Callahan scored twice in the third period as the Rangers handed Washington its sixth consecutive defeat.

Mired in a scoring slump, Ovechkin got in a rare fight when he went toe-to-toe with New York's Brandon Dubinsky in the second period. The two-time NHL MVP left the game in the third after being hit by a shot but said afterward his knee was

OK.

Marian Gaborik and Dubinsky also scored early in the second to put the Rangers ahead 4-0. Marc Staal added a short-handed goal at 10:42.

Brandon Prust opened the scoring in the first. Semyon Varlamov allowed all seven goals on 20 shots.

Washington, a preseason Stanley Cup favorite, has dropped six in a row for the first time since March 2007. The last time the Capitals lost to the Rangers by at least seven goals was an 11-4 setback in March 1978.

Ducks 6, Wild 2

At Anaheim, California, Corey Perry scored from a penalty shot while recording his first career hat trick, Ryan Getzlaf had two goals and

Bobby Ryan also found the net, powering Anaheim over Minnesota.

It was the third game this season in which each member of the Ducks' top line scored. Perry and Ryan each added two assists and Getzlaf had one. The combined total of 11 points was easily a season best for the trio.

Minnesota defenseman Brent Burns extended his goal-scoring streak to three games and Marek Zidlicky scored on a power play.

Canucks 2, Oilers 1

At Edmonton, Alberta, Henrik Sedin had a goal and an assist against Edmonton, giving Vancouver three straight road wins for the first time in more than a year.

Alex Burrows also scored for



New York Rangers' Ryan Callahan, center, and teammates Brandon Dubinsky, left, and Michael Sauer celebrate Callahan's second goal of the game in the third period of their hockey game against the Washington Capitals at Madison Square Garden in New York, Sunday, Dec. 12, 2010. The Rangers won 7-0.

Associated Press

AP source: Athletics and Hideki Matsui nearing deal

JANIE McCAULEY,

AP Baseball Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Free agent slugger Hideki Matsui and the Oakland Athletics worked Monday to finalize a contract that would make him the team's new designated hitter. A person with knowledge of the deal confirmed to The Associated Press that the sides were close. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because there was no formal announcement. The deal was expected to be finalized Tuesday after a physical.

The A's also agreed to terms with right-hander Joey Devine on a one-year contract worth

\$557,500, leaving five players eligible for arbitration: Dallas Braden, Craig Breslow, Conor Jackson, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Brad Ziegler. Right-hander Brandon McCarthy also received a one-year contract.

Oakland general manager Billy Beane has been looking for a DH this winter to boost production in the middle of the batting order. The A's hit just 109 homers and scored 663 runs last season, their second-fewest in the last 28 non-strike seasons. The 36-year-old Matsui batted .274 with 21 home runs and 84 RBIs last season with the Los Angeles Angels, the Athletics' AL West rival. □

the Canucks, who have won six of eight. Daniel Sedin assisted on both Vancouver goals, and Roberto Luongo stopped Magnus Paajarvi on a penalty shot.

Jordan Eberle scored with 5 seconds left for the Oilers,

who have lost two of three but still have five wins in their last seven games.

The Canucks outshot Edmonton 32-12, with the Oilers registering only one shot in the third period for the second game in a row. □



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matinee: 12:45 - 3:30
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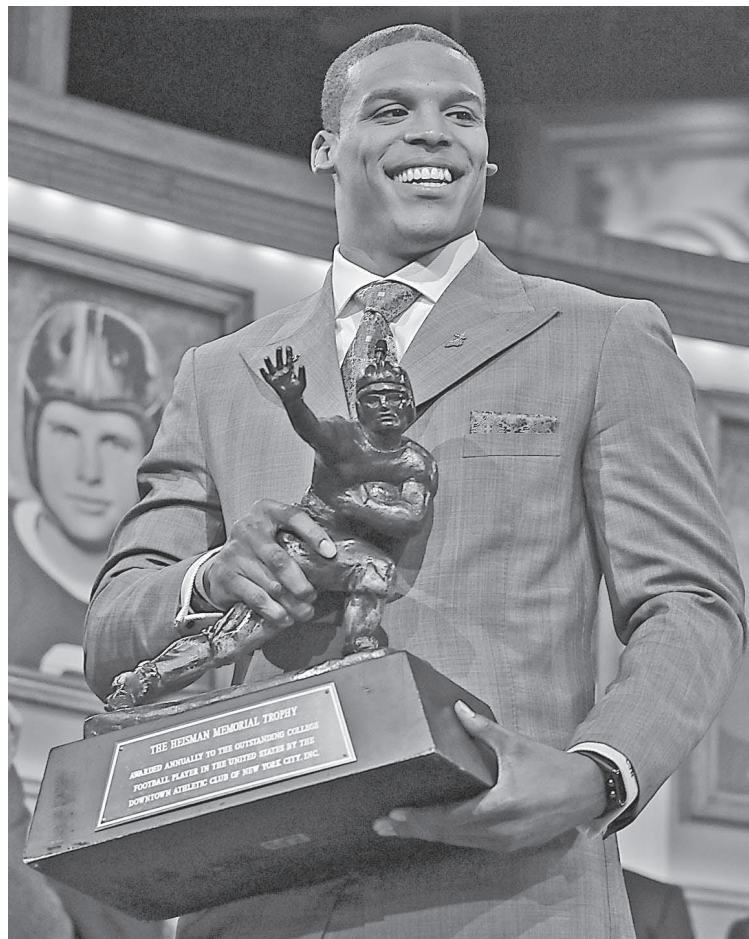
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Newton could be one-and-done at Auburn



In this photo provided by the Heisman Trophy Trust, Auburn quarterback Cam Newton picks up the Heisman Trophy after his acceptance speech following being named the Heisman Trophy winner, Saturday, Dec. 11, 2010, in New York.

By RALPH D. RUSSO

AP College Football Writer

NEW YORK — If Cam Newton decides to be one-and-done at Auburn and enter the NFL draft, he probably won't have to wait long to be taken.

Longtime NFL personnel man Gil Brandt, now working as a draft consultant, called Newton "the most exciting player I can ever remember watching" and said the 6-foot-6, 250-pound quarterback has displayed all the physical skills necessary to be an NFL star.

"I am not an advocate of guys coming out of school early," Brandt said in a recent telephone interview. "But I think that if he does come out of school, I don't think there's any question he'll be selected in the first half of the first round (of the draft) unless there is something physically wrong with him."

Newton, to no one's surprise,

won the Heisman Trophy on Saturday night in a landslide. He put together one of the most impressive seasons ever for a college quarterback, displaying a wide array of skills.

Early in the season, Auburn leaned heavily on Newton's ability to run. He had a string of four straight games against Southeastern Conference opponents in which he ran for more than 170 yards.

He's as big as most linebackers so he's able to run over and through tacklers. He's also nimble and fast enough to run away from defenders.

Tennessee Titans quarterback Vince Young, who was drafted with the third overall pick in 2006, might be a good comparison, but Newton outweighs him by about 20 pounds and is an inch taller. Young seems to be faster, but the scouts with the stop watches will ultimately find out exactly how fast Newton can run.

Still, NFL quarterbacks can't make a living running the ball. In the second half of the season, as Auburn's opponents became more intent on stopping Newton in the running game, he passed more.

The results were encouraging. The junior has completed 67 percent of his passes for 2,589 yards and 28 touchdowns with only six interceptions.

"He has excellent accuracy," Brandt said. "I'm amazed at his accuracy whether it be 10 yards down field or 20 yards down field or more. He's got arm strength."

"There is no question he is physically ready."

Brandt said the only thing Newton doesn't have he can only get by staying in school for another season: experience.

After Newton and Auburn play Oregon in the BCS championship in Glendale, Ariz., on Jan. 10, he will have started a total of 14 college games.

"When I guy gets to around 30 games in college, that usually is when the light turns on," Brandt said.

Two reasons why Newton might not stay:

_If he's going to be an early first-round pick, it's hard to put that off.

_The lingering cloud of an NCAA investigation into his recruitment out of junior college is still hanging over Newton.

The NCAA ruled that his father tried to get Mississippi State to pay for Newton to play for the Bulldogs. There was no evidence Newton knew what his father did or that Auburn was involved, so he was allowed to keep playing. But the case is not closed.

Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck, who finished second to Newton in the Heisman voting, is also facing a stay-or-go-decision as a third-year sophomore.

Luck has started for two seasons, has played in a prostyle offense under former NFL quarterback and Cardinal coach Jim Harbaugh and is generally thought to be a lock to be drafted in the first few picks.

Luck, whose father, Oliver Luck, played in the NFL, said he'll talk to his family and coaches after the Cardinal play in the Orange Bowl then decide whether to leave school early.

"I haven't given it too much thought," Luck said before the Heisman ceremony. "I am going to sit down with my parents and talk to coach Harbaugh, mostly likely friends, and see what's best."

The last player in Andrew Luck's situation was Oklahoma quarterback Sam Bradford, who won the Heisman as a third-year sophomore in 2008.

Bradford returned to school for another year, suffered a shoulder injury that wiped out most of his season, and still ended up being the top pick overall in the last draft.

Newton, of course, has said he'll think about the NFL after the BCS championship game. The NFL, though, is already thinking about him.

"The sky's the limit for that kid," Brandt said. □

Auburn says Gus Malzahn not leaving Tigers

By JOHN ZENOR

AP Sports Writer

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Auburn coach Gene Chizik said offensive coordinator Gus Malzahn has received a raise and contract extension, apparently ending fears that Malzahn would leave to take the Vanderbilt head coaching job.

"Gus Malzahn has played a large role in the success of our football program the last two years and we're very pleased to be able to give him a raise and extend his contract," Chizik said in a statement Monday. "In my opinion we have the best staff in the country, and while we want our coaches to strive to become head coaches, retaining them as long as we can is important to me and the entire Auburn family."

"Gus is a very bright and talented coach and we are looking forward to beginning preparation for the BCS national championship."

The Tigers (13-0) will face Oregon for the national title on Jan. 10 in Glendale, Ariz.

Neither Chizik nor Auburn has confirmed that Malzahn has been offered — and turned down — the Vanderbilt position. Details of Malzahn's new deal were not released.

A person familiar with the situation says Auburn will "more than double" Malzahn's

\$500,000 salary. The person spoke with The Associated Press Monday on condition of anonymity because details of the deal were not publicly announced.

Malzahn, who won the Broyles Award as the nation's top assistant coach, is also Auburn's quarterbacks coach and works with Heisman Trophy winner Cam Newton.

"I'm very appreciative of coach Chizik and the entire administration for their support," Malzahn said.

"My family and I love Auburn and right now my main focus is helping Auburn win a national championship."

Auburn ranks sixth nationally in rushing and scoring offense and seventh in total offense. Newton leads the nation in pass efficiency.

The announcement came a day after a report surfaced that Malzahn had accepted the head coaching job at Vanderbilt.

Rod Williamson, Vanderbilt's director of communications, told the AP on Monday by text only that, "Our process is continuing. I can't confirm discussions, but I can say that we are relentlessly pursuing the right" coach.

Vice Chancellor David Williams declined Sunday to say if Vanderbilt had offered Malzahn the job. □

Devils' 13-year playoff run in serious jeopardy

By TOM CANAVAN

AP Sports Writer

NEWARK, N.J. — For the past 16-plus seasons, playing hockey has been fun for New Jersey Devils goaltender Martin Brodeur. It was a sport he loved to play. He earned a bundle of money doing it, and the Devils always were a threat to win it all.

Talk hockey with Brodeur these days, however, and that ever-present smile isn't always there.

For the first time in his long career, the three-time Stanley Cup-champion Devils are no longer competitive and their streak of making the playoffs for 13 consecutive years is in serious jeopardy. They are 17 points out of a playoff berth.

This could be the year of the Devils' demise, and it's only 29 games into season. How bad is it?

The Devils' 18 total points after 29 games is the second worst in the NHL. Only the nearby New York Islanders have fewer points (15) and they have played two less games heading into Monday night's action.

New Jersey also is mired in one of its worst slumps in years, having lost five straight games. The streak is the longest since it lost six in a row (0-5-1) late in 2008-09. All five losses have come in regulation, marking the first time that has happened since November 2000, when it lost six in a row.

"It's tiring playing like that," Brodeur said. "Not having fun is not fun. We're trying hard. We're playing hard to change things but it seems not to be working. Hopefully, we'll get through this. I know it is hard.

"Right now, we can't even look at the playoffs. I think this is something, hopefully it (the playoffs) will be there later on, but right now

we have to concentrate on the next game and play day by day. That's it."

The unexpected slump has put rookie coach John MacLean's job in jeopardy and left president and general manager Lou Lamoriello searching for answers in a season that no one anticipated.

"I don't think anyone is feeling good about where we stand, but you can't do anything about what's transpired," Lamoriello said Monday. "Right now, we have to focus in on Wednesday night's game and that's what we have to get ready for."

Lamoriello refused to discuss MacLean's future.

"Right now, this is our hockey team, this is our coaching staff, this is where we're at," he said. "I'm not going to get into anymore questions about it."

Despite another first-round playoff disappointment last season, the expectations for the Devils were high. Lamoriello re-signed high-scoring forward Ilya Kovalchuk to a 15-year, \$100 million contract after the league voided the original 17-year pact for circumventing the salary cap.

Defensemen Anton Volchenkov and Henrik Tallinder were signed as free agents after Paul Martin decided to sign with Pittsburgh. And Brodeur was coming off a year in which he led the league in goals against average for the fifth time.

Things just haven't worked out and it starts with Kovalchuk, who averaged more than 42 goals in his first eight seasons. He has five in a season where New Jersey has scored a league-low 53 times.

"Last year, we didn't have that problem," said Kovalchuk, who seemingly has been booed with every



New Jersey Devils goaltender Martin Brodeur cannot stop a shot by Detroit Red Wings' Tomas Holmstrom, not shown, for a goal during the first period of an NHL hockey game Saturday, Dec. 11, 2010 in Newark, N.J.

on-ice mistake at the Prudential Center. "This year, I don't know. We have so many chances, crossbars, posts, miss the net, broken sticks. It's just one of those starts where nothing goes our way. We have to stick with it."

Kovalchuk isn't the only problem. Zach Parise, who scored 38 goals last season, will be sidelined until February because of knee surgery, and Jamie Langenbrunner and Travis Zajac have been limited to three goals apiece.

This also has been an uncharacteristic season for the defense, which has surrendered 88 goals. A big problem for the back line has been moving the puck out of its own zone.

"You can't go at it on your own to turn things around," MacLean said. "It's going to have to be turned around together. Everybody together has to turn it around."

It starts with MacLean, a Devil through and through, who was an assistant coach here and is still the second all-time leading scorer with 701 points in 934 games. He

is in a tough spot because of the injuries, and let's face it, the Atlantic Division — with the Penguins, Flyers and Rangers all playing well — is not going to give the Devils many breaks.

If the Devils are going to change things, they have to stop the mistakes. In losing to Detroit 4-1 on Saturday, they made two mistakes in the opening 1:42 and fell behind 2-0.

"It seems like we'll get an early break against us, and they'll score and it's kind of like: 'Here we go again,'" veteran forward Brian Rolston said.

"We have to be mentally tough in those situations, where we know we can come back. Let's face it, we haven't been successful this year and we have to get back to it."

Most of the players have stopped looking at the standings. It can be depressing, and it also can cause them to lose focus on the things at hand.

For the Devils, that's Phoenix on Wednesday night.

"We can't doubt ourselves," said Jason Arnott, who leads

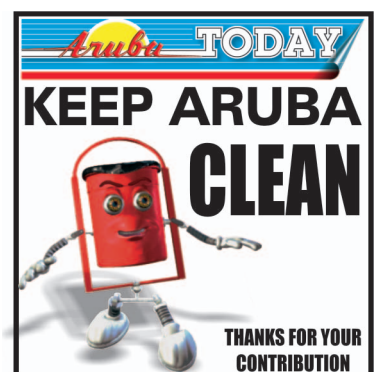
the team with nine goals. "We know it's not in our favor right now. We can't worry about that. We have to try to get as many points as we can every game from now until the end of the year, or else it is going to be an early year."

In the midst of all the concern, the Devils, at least, had a few hours to relax on Sunday at their annual Christmas party. Families skated together, and children visited with Santa Claus.

Brodeur laughed when asked if he asked Santa for a few wins. But his children spoke with St. Nick.

"I didn't tell them what to wish for," Brodeur said with a smile that reminded many of years past, "but they have to live with their dad. So, they know what to wish for." □

Associated Press



SPORTS BRIEFS

Appleby voted comeback player on PGA Tour

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Florida (AP) — Stuart Appleby has been voted the PGA Tour comeback player of the year after going from his worst season to a magical win. Appleby won The Greenbrier Classic by closing with a 59, making him one of only two players to hit golf's magic number in the last round. His historic win followed a year in which he finished outside the top 125 on the money list for the first time since his rookie season. The Australian used a one-time exemption for career money to keep his card. His win helped him to finish 38th on the money list, and he topped off his year by winning the Australian Masters.



Australia's Stuart Appleby reacts after missing a put during the final round of the Australian Masters at Victoria Golf Club in Melbourne, Australia, Sunday, Nov. 14, 2010.

Associated Press

over Rocco Mediate and Players voted for Appleby Arjun Atwal. □

Men's final U.S. Open warmup moving to N.C.

WINSTON-SALEM, North Carolina (AP) — The men's tennis warmup before the U.S. Open is moving from New Haven, Connecticut, to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, starting in August.

The U.S. Tennis Association and ATP tour announced Monday that the 48-draw event will be played in a new tennis facility on Wake Forest University's campus. It'll be held Aug. 21-27 and serve as the final warmup before year's final Grand Slam tournament.

It replaces the event that has been held in New Haven for many years and has been known as the Pilot Pen.

The Winston-Salem tournament will be held in a new facility that will include a 3,500-seat center court and two show courts with seating of at least 1,500 fans each. □

Mahut, Isner to meet at Hopman Cup

PERTH, Australia (AP) — Nicholas Mahut and John Isner will meet at the Hopman Cup next month in what will be the pair's first rematch since they shared the longest match in professional tennis history at Wimbledon this year.

Mahut was named Monday to replace Gael Monfils in the French team for the mixed tournament. He will partner Kristina Mladenovic after Monfils' withdrew with a knee injury.

Isner has already been named to represent the United States and the pair are due to clash in the Jan. 3 singles, their first meeting since the 183-game, 11 hour epic at Wimbledon in June. □

Harvick hires Nelson Piquet Jr.

KERNERSVILLE, North Carolina (AP) — Former Formula One driver Nelson Piquet Jr. will drive in the Trucks Series for Kevin Harvick Inc. next season.

The Brazilian drove five races this last season for two different Trucks Series teams. His best finish was sixth at Daytona.

Piquet drove for Renault in Formula 1 in 2008 and part of 2009, and later admitted he crashed on team orders in a 2008 race at Singapore to help his teammate win.

Renault officials accused Piquet and his father of making up the claims. But last week, Piquet won a libel lawsuit against the race team.

Piquet says the timing of the announcement with Harvick and the conclusion of his libel suit is coincidental. □



In this Sept. 12, 2010 file photo, Brazil's Cesar Cielo celebrates after winning the men's 50m Freestyle final at the FINA Swimming World Cup 2010 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Associated Press

Cielo leads solid cast at short-course swim worlds

ANDREW DAMPF

AP Sports Writer

ROME (AP) — Cesar Cielo will get the chance to re-establish his No. 1 status in short-course swimming this week, when the Brazilian competes at the world championships in Dubai after a dip in form at his last major event. Only last year, Cielo was the undisputed leader in sprint swimming. He won the 50-meter freestyle at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and then swept both sprints — the 50 and 100 free — at the 2009 long-course worlds in Rome. But he failed to win over both distances at the Pan Pacific championships in August, where American sprinter Nathan Adrian prevailed. Now Cielo is set to renew his rivalry with Adrian during the championships which will run from Wednesday to Sunday and feature nearly 800 swimmers from 148 countries. Michael Phelps won't be traveling to the United Arab Emirates — he's still relaxing before gearing up for one final Olympic run — but teammate Ryan Lochte, who has clearly taken over as the best, most versatile swimmer in the world, is entered. Lochte has a full program planned, featuring the 100-, 200- and 400-meter individual medleys, the 200 freestyle and 200 backstroke — plus relays. Australia is sending a team of 27 swimmers including

the likes of Geoff Huegill and Leisel Jones. And Italy's Federica Pellegrini, Swedish standouts Therese Alshammar and Sarah Sjöström, Liu Zige of China, and Alain Bernard of France are also coming. Cielo is meanwhile feeling upbeat about his prospects. "I've got pretty good confidence in myself through the training I'm getting," he said recently. "I love short course, I've always been really good at short course, and my records are still there. I'm going to have fun, trying to drop my times and see what happens from there." With the pool length only 25 meters — vs. 50 meters for long course — short-course meets put a premium on turns and underwater swimming. Cielo got a reminder of that when he made what he called a child's mistake in the 50 free final at the Brazilian short-course championships a couple weeks ago. He won the event, but his winning time — 21.46 seconds — was slower than the 21.31 he clocked in heats the day before. "From now on I just want to be the best swimmer I can be," Cielo said. "I want to step up to the blocks, feel confident and feel in shape. ... I have won Olympics and world championships, so I don't think I have got to prove anything else to anyone." Whether he wins or not, one thing Cielo likely won't accomplish is a world record.

This meet is the first world championships since rubberized suits were banned last year and not one long-course world record has been set in all of 2010. At the last short-course worlds in Manchester, England, two years ago, a whopping 18 world records were set. However, swimming devotees will be comparing the winning times in Dubai not with world records, but with previous best times set in textile suits. For example, the time to beat in the 50 free will be the 20.80 that Cielo swam earlier this year, which is a half-second off the world record set by South Africa's Roland Schoeman in 2009 during the rubber-suit era. The meet also marks the return of the swimming community to the United Arab Emirates less than two months after the death of American open water athlete Fran Crippen during a race off Fujairah, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of Dubai. Crippen's death has resulted in two separate investigations focusing on allegations that the sport's governing body FINA failed to ensure safe conditions. FINA executive director Cornel Marculescu was worried about the readiness of the Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Sports Complex when he visited Dubai earlier this year, but has now given top marks to the newly constructed arena. □

Web video future at heart of Comcast, NBC review

By JOELLE TESSLER,
AP Technology Writer

WASHINGTON — It won't be long before video from the Internet is always within reach — whether it's on a smart phone, a tablet computer or a high-end television in your living room.

But what if there's nothing worth watching?

Just as the online video market is starting to take shape, federal regulators have a rare opportunity to help protect its future as they scrutinize Comcast Corp.'s proposal to take over NBC Universal.

Regulators are pushing for tough conditions to ensure that Comcast can't stifle online video services by withholding content or pushing up prices for marquee NBC programs at a time viewers are starting to turn to the Internet for recent movies or the latest episodes of "Saturday Night Live," "30 Rock" and other popular TV shows.

The concessions they extract from Comcast in its bid for NBC will help determine whether customers can someday realistically drop their cable subscriptions and go online-only for their TV.

So far, established media companies, including broadcasters and cable providers, are moving online with caution, fearful that the Internet could jeopardize business models they have relied on for decades. They have kept many television shows and movies off the Web, and built barriers around what's available online, restricting who can watch it and where.

Comcast has been resisting federal regulators' efforts to tear down some of those walls, arguing that those efforts are unnecessary because NBC Universal accounts for about 10 percent of television viewing in the U.S. and less than 10 percent of U.S. box office revenue — and is therefore too small to dictate how the industry will develop.

But the two sides are close to an agreement, which could pave the way for the Federal Communications Commission and the Justice Department to approve the deal as early as this week.

Comcast's proposed \$13.75 billion purchase of a 51 percent stake in NBC Universal would transform the media landscape. It would give the nation's largest cable television company control over a major movie studio, Universal Studios, and some of the most-watched channels on TV, including the NBC and Telemundo broadcast networks and CNBC, Bravo and Oxygen on cable.

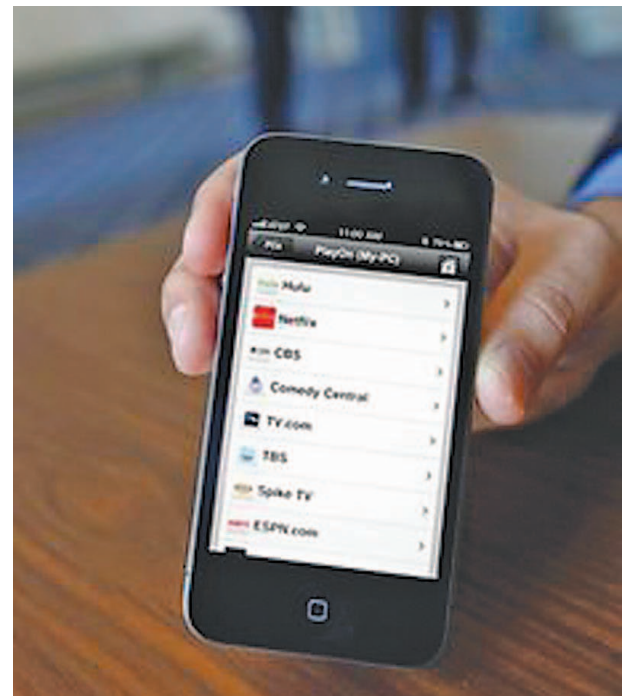
So what regulators do — or don't do — will set key ground rules for the industry.

"Whether you're holding a remote or using a mouse, this merger will affect the prices you pay, the choices you have and the pace of video innovation for many years to come," said Colin Crowell, a former FCC senior staffer and 20-year congressional aide who is now advising several groups concerned about the combination.

Both Comcast and NBC insist that Internet video represents an opportunity to expand their reach and say they have no intention of stunting the growth of the nascent market.

But already, Comcast is participating in an industry-wide program to limit online viewing of many popular shows to cable subscribers. And NBC has joined other broadcast networks in blocking access to full episodes of its shows through Google Inc.'s Google TV software, which delivers Web content to TV sets.

Until recently, online viewing had largely been limited to personal computers, using standard Web browsers or video software. Some shows are free, with ads, just like regular broadcasts. Others carry a fee — as little as 99 cents for a single television



IN this Nov. 19, 2010 photo, Jeff Lawrence, CEO of 'playon' displays his iPhone4, with the website on the screen, on Capitol Hill in Washington. It won't be long before an Internet-connected video screen is always at your fingertips — whether it's a smart phone, a tablet computer or a high-end television set hooked up to a Google TV or Apple TV device. But what if there's nothing to watch?

(AP Photo/Harry Hamburg)

episode through Amazon.com Inc., for example, or less than \$10 a month for unlimited access to programming on Netflix Inc.

Now, though, a slew of new devices relay Internet video to television sets. The Apple TV and Roku set-top boxes, for instance, serve as bridges to deliver online programs to the TV. Some high-end sets connect directly to the Internet. □

Gawker.com says its user database was compromised

NEW YORK — Gawker Media Inc. is urging subscribers to change their passwords because someone has managed to hack into the company's user database.

The company, which runs a series of irreverent blogs on media, technology and other issues, said in a posting on its website Sunday that the commenting passwords used on the sites were encrypted, but simple ones could be vulnerable to attacks by hackers' computers.

The company also said passwords on other sites should be changed if they were the same as the ones stored by Gawker Media.

"We're deeply embarrassed

by this breach," the posting on gawker.com said. "We should not be in the position of relying on the goodwill of the hackers who identified the weakness in our systems."

Millions of people are likely affected by the breach because of the popularity of Gawker's sites such as Gizmodo, a tech gadget news site, said Rich Mogull, CEO of Phoenix-based Securosis, a security research firm.

The damage should be minimal, though, because Gawker probably stored only e-mails, user names and passwords, Mogull said. The problem comes if people use the same passwords on other sites, such as online



A Minnesota couple says they are leaving the decision about whether they should get an abortion up to an online poll posted on a website showing ultrasounds of the healthy, 16-week old fetus dubbed "Wiggles." Pete and Alisha Arnold, both 30, insisted that the website is not a prank or a convoluted anti-abortion campaign, in an interview posted Thursday on Gawker.com.

banking. The hackers likely were able to figure out easy passwords even though they were protected on the Gawker site by a simple algorithm, and could use them to access bank accounts, Mogull said.

The hackers could be upset about something written on one of Gawker's sites, or they could be doing it for bragging rights, Mogull said.

"It's kind of a juvenile thing. It's like spray-painting," he said.

Such attacks are very common and difficult to stop, as long as the hackers have enough time to try to breach the system, he said. "If someone is determined and knowledgeable, you can't keep them out," he said.

The attacks probably are unrelated to recent cyberspace attacks over the WikiLeaks site's release of classified government documents, but Gawker could have angered some of the same people, Mogull said.

Last week, the Visa and MasterCard sites were inaccessible for a short time likely because of attacks by supporters of WikiLeaks. Supporters were angry that the credit card companies had stopped processing donations to WikiLeaks.

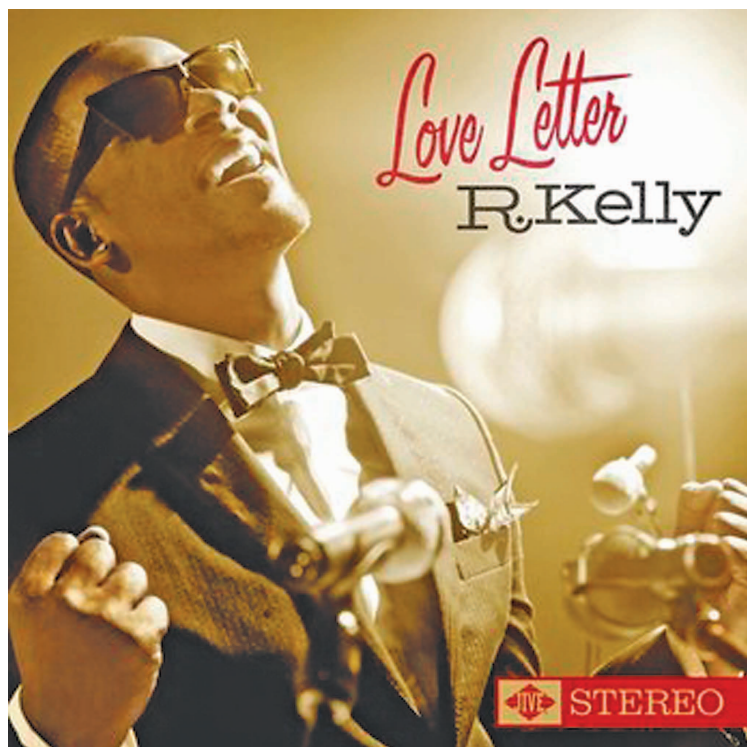
Both MasterCard and Visa said that cardholders' accounts were not at risk and that people could continue using their credit cards.

Supporters of WikiLeaks, which has released thousands of classified government documents in recent weeks, said they would attack companies and groups hostile to the site and its founder. An Internet group operating under the label "Operation Payback" claimed responsibility for the MasterCard and Visa problems in messages on Twitter and elsewhere.

Messages were left Sunday night for Gawker chief Nick Denton.

Gawker's Gizmodo tech blog gained fame in May when it posted pictures of an iPhone prototype. The phone was lost by an Apple Inc. engineer in a Silicon Valley bar.

Review: R. Kelly is classic and classy on great CD



In this CD cover image released by Jive Records, the latest by R. Kelly, ‘Love Letter,’ is shown.

(AP Photo/Jive)

By **NEKESA MUMBI MOODY**,
AP Music Writer

R. Kelly, “Love Letter” (Jive)
Is that you, R. Kelly?

That may be a fair question to ask after listening to “Love Letter,” the brilliant new album from the self-proclaimed Pied Piper of R&B.

“Love Letter” is a gorgeous, 15-track ode to the various stages

of love, drawing from a retro soul style and delivered with romantic grace. While there’s no doubt Kelly is capable of musical greatness, the grace part might throw off some.

Kelly has produced some of R&B’s most poignant and moving songs but he’s better known for his salacious sexual grooves. Over the last few years, those songs appeared to be Kelly’s only specialty, turning the multidimensional singer-songwriter-producer into a one-note, tired act.

But the genius of R. Kelly has been resurrected and is on full display on “Love Letter,” which echoes Sam Cooke, Teddy Pendergrass and even a bit of Luther Vandross for a grown-folks love album that won’t shock the parents or scare the children. The first single, the epic “When a Women Loves,” is a tour de force that not only puts Kelly’s wondrous songwriting on display, but also showcases a voice that has little competition when it comes to pure power and passion.

That song represents the album’s masterpiece, but there are plenty of masterful moments throughout. “How Do I Tell Her” is a moving tearjerker about a leaving a loved one, while “Music Must Be a Lady” is a sensual missive to what may be Kelly’s greatest love. The percussive “Taxi Cab” is the album’s raciest track, but after hearing about Kelly’s sexual exploits in the kitchen, cars and elsewhere, a song about making love in a taxi sounds downright quaint.

The album ends on a bittersweet note with the bonus track “You Are Not Alone,” the No. 1 hit he wrote for Michael Jackson. As Kelly sings it, it becomes less of a love song and more of a mournful, beautiful remembrance of a departed loved one.

“Love Letter,” reminiscent of Kelly’s 2004 CD, “Happy People,” is one of the best albums of his career, and may be among the best of the year. Here’s hoping that those turned off by his crass material of late will pay attention to this classy, and classic, gem. □

Rapper Ja Rule pleads guilty in NY weapon case

By **JENNIFER PELTZ**,
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ja Rule agreed Monday to go to prison for two years in a gun case, becoming the second platinum-selling rapper set to do time after arrests in the aftermath of a star-studded hip-hop concert in July 2007.

The rapper-actor — whose gravelly voice, thuggish tough talk and duets with R&B divas made him one of rap’s stars in the early 2000s — pleaded guilty to attempted criminal possession of a weapon. Lil Wayne was arrested separately the same night and later pleaded guilty to the same charge.

Speaking in a low voice, Ja Rule said nothing beyond “guilty” and “yes” to a Manhattan judge’s questions as he admitted to a charge that involves attempting to have a loaded gun outside one’s home or workplace. Police said they found a loaded gun in a rear door of his \$250,000-plus Maybach after it was stopped for speeding. His plea deal promises the

34-year-old rapper a two-year prison term compared to the 15-year stint he could have faced if convicted of the original gun charges against him. He remains free until his sentencing.

“This isn’t a good day,” Ja Rule said as he headed to a waiting SUV, waving to some fans who recognized him behind his dark sunglasses. His lawyer, Stacey Richman, declined to comment.

He’s due in court Feb. 9 to set a date for his sentencing.

“Because of your guilty plea here today, you’ll have a record of having committed a violent felony. This is a very serious matter,” Manhattan state Supreme Court Justice Richard Carruthers told him Monday. Ja Rule is the latest in a series of big-name rappers poised for incarceration, a lineup that has raised questions about the line between art and reality in a genre rife with tales of gang life. Hip-hop stars including Tupac Shakur, Lil’ Kim, Foxy Brown, Shyne, Mystikal, Gucci Mane and T.I. have been in jail or prison for

periods ranging from months to years.

Earlier this year, rap star Lil Wayne spent eight months in a New York City jail after pleading guilty to the same charge as Ja Rule.

They were stopped, separately, after leaving the Beacon Theatre on July 22, 2007. Lil Wayne had just headlined a show there featuring other rappers including Ja Rule; the two had recently joined forces on a single called “Uh Oh.”

Police said they smelled marijuana and found a .40-caliber semiautomatic gun in Ja Rule’s car. He wasn’t charged with drug possession, and a judge threw out the rapper’s statement to police that he had “a little bit of weed” in his pocket.

About an hour later, Lil Wayne’s tour bus was stopped about a mile away. He admitted last year that he had a loaded, semiautomatic .40-caliber gun on the bus.

Lil Wayne, 28, was sentenced in March to a year in jail, gaining early release last month because of time off for



Rapper Ja Rule leaves court in New York, Monday, Dec. 13, 2010. He pleaded guilty to attempted criminal possession of a weapon stemming from a July 2007 stop of his luxury sports car.

(AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

good behavior.

Manhattan prosecutors declined to compare the rappers’ cases and plea deals. In another recent Manhattan gun case that grabbed headlines, former New York Giants wide receiver and Super Bowl hero Plaxico Burress pleaded guilty last year to the same charge of attempted weapon possession and was sentenced to two years in prison. □

‘Black Swan’ earns 12 Critics’ Choice nominations

By **DAVID GERMAIN**,
AP Movie Writer

LOS ANGELES — Natalie Portman’s ballet drama “Black Swan” led contenders Monday for the Critics’ Choice Movie Awards with a record 12 nominations, among them best picture and actress.

Other best-picture nominees were the survival story “127 Hours,” the boxing saga “The Fighter,” the sci-fi smash “Inception,” the British monarchy tale “The King’s Speech,” the Facebook chronicle “The Social Network,” the heist thriller “The Town,” the animated blockbuster “Toy Story 3,” the Western “True Grit” and the Ozarks crime yarn “Winter’s Bone.” Presented by the 250 members of the Broadcast Film Critics Association, the 16th annual awards will be handed out Jan. 14 in a ceremony at the Hollywood Palladium in Los Angeles. VH1 will air the show live.

Along with Portman’s lead-actress nomination, honors for “Black Swan” include a supporting-actress slot for Mila Kunis and a directing nomination for Darren Aronofsky. “The King’s Speech” and “True Grit” were second with 11 nominations each. Among “The King’s Speech” honors were a best-actor nomination for Colin Firth and supporting slots for Helena Bonham Carter and Geoffrey Rush. “True Grit” star Jeff Bridges also earned a best-actor nomination, while his newcomer co-star, 14-year-old Hailee Steinfeld, had two nominations, as supporting actress and best young actor or actress. Also earning two acting nominations were “Winter’s Bone” star Jennifer Lawrence, contending for both lead actress and best young actor or actress; and Chloe Moretz, who earned two spots in the young actor or actress category, for the action comedy “Kick-Ass” and the vampire tale “Let Me In.” □



Hopes for Senate passage of tax deal lifts stocks

By DAVID K. RANDALL,
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — Expectations that a tax cut package will pass the Senate and a round of corporate deals pushed stocks higher Monday. Bond yields fell after touching their highest levels since June.

Deals announced Monday include General Electric Co.'s \$1.3 billion acquisition of British oilfield company Wellstream Holdings PLC and Dell Inc.'s \$960 million purchase of network storage company Compellent Technologies Inc. Shares of GE fell 0.2 percent to \$17.68. Shares of Dell fell 3.3 percent to \$13.43.

The tax cut compromise brokered by the White House and Congressional Republicans was scheduled for its first vote in the Senate on Monday afternoon. Lawmakers expect it to pass

easily.

If enacted, the package will extend tax cuts passed during the Bush administration for all income levels for another two years. It will also extend unemployment benefits through next year and put in place a one-year reduction in Social Security taxes.

Economists expect the nearly \$900 billion tax package to boost economic growth and increase the size of the budget deficit. House Democrats have pledged to block the measure unless tax rates rise for the nation's wealthiest estates.

In afternoon trading, the Dow Jones industrial average rose 48, or 0.4 percent, to 11,459.10. If the index closes above 11,440.08 it will set a new high for the year. It last closed at that level Nov. 5.

The Standard and Poor's 500 index rose 5.03, or 0.4 percent, to 1,245.43. The S&P

500 closed at 1,240.40 Friday, the third time in as many days that it closed at a new high for the year.

The Nasdaq composite index rose 2.76, or 0.1 percent, to 2,640.30. It has closed at new annual highs for the last 8 days.

The tax plan has crushed the prices of Treasury bonds since it was announced last week. The yield of 10-year Treasuries rose to 3.36 percent early Monday before falling to 3.27. Treasuries reversed course after the Federal Reserve bought \$7.8 billion in government bonds coming due between 2016 and 2017. Treasury yields have been mainly rising over the past month.

"It looks like the big trade going on right now is that money is working its way out of bonds and into stocks," said Ryan Detrick, a senior



FILE - In this Dec. 2, 2010 file photo, trader Brian Dolan, left, works with specialist Thomas Facchine on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew, file)

Tax-cut plan eases pressure on Bernanke and Fed

By JEANNINE AVERSA,
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve last month absorbed a wave of criticism for announcing it will buy \$600 billion in Treasury bonds to try to revitalize the economy. It won't help, critics said.

So when Fed officials meet Tuesday, they're likely to feel a weight has been lifted: The White House and key Republicans have agreed on a tax-cut deal that's expected to do just what critics said the Fed's bond purchases wouldn't: Boost spending, spur hiring and speed economic growth.

Economists say they think the Fed will still carry out its full \$600 billion bond-buying plan by the end of June as scheduled. Unemployment is 9.8 percent, and the economy needs all the help it can get.

But the tax-cut plan does make the Fed less likely to buy even more than \$600 billion in bonds — something Chairman Ben Bernanke said it might do if the economy needed further help. No policy changes are expected at the Fed's meeting.

"The tax-cut plan reduces pressure on the Fed to have to buy more government securities," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics. "I think they are committed to \$600

billion because they aren't certain how things will turn out. It's always possible the economy could rev up rapidly. But I think the odds are low the Fed will do less."

Zandi and other economists think the tax cuts will help stimulate growth over the next two years. And consequently, the Fed might have to raise record-low interest rates sooner than had been expected. That's because stronger growth increases the risk of high inflation, which the Fed fights by raising rates to cool the economy. The tax-cut plan will also swell the government's annual budget deficits, which are already running well over \$1 trillion.

Zandi and others now think the Fed will start raising rates in late 2012, compared with early 2013 without the tax-cut plan.

The Fed announced its Treasury-purchase plan at its last meeting, Nov. 3. At the time, Congress seemed unlikely to do much on its own to strengthen the economy. Bernanke felt Congress' reluctance to approve new stimulative spending obliged the Fed to do what it could to further drive down interest rates.

But early this month, the White House and Republicans forged a broad tax-cut deal that seems likely to pass despite resistance from many Democrats. □

strategist at Schaeffer's Investment Research. "We think that is only going to continue as the economy starts looking better."

World stock markets rose. China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index gained 2.8 percent after Chinese authorities surprised investors by not raising interest rates. Investors had anticipated an interest rate hike to combat high inflation.

Blue chip stocks in Europe rose 0.2 percent. The dollar fell 0.9 percent against an index of six currencies. Commodity prices rose 0.9

percent.

In corporate news, Hewlett-Packard Co. fell 1.3 percent to \$41.99 after Goldman Sachs gave the hardware company a sell rating. Goldman's analysts see tablet computers, such as Apple Inc.'s iPad, taking business away from PCs. Shares in Dionex Corp. shot up 20 percent to \$117.96, after Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc. said Monday it planned to buy the maker of laboratory equipment for \$2.1 billion. Thermo Fisher said it will pay \$118.50 a share. Shares in Thermo Fisher rose 3.6 percent to \$54.97. □

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Medicaid cuts: teeth pulled, transplant called off



CHICAGO — In Illinois, a pharmacist closes his business because of late Medicaid payments. In Arizona, a young father's liver transplant is canceled because Medicaid suddenly won't pay for it. In California, dentists pull teeth that could be saved because Medicaid doesn't pay for root canals.

Across the country, state lawmakers have taken harsh actions to try to rein in the budget-busting costs of the health care program that serves 58 million poor and disabled Americans. Some states have cut payments to doctors, paid bills late and trimmed benefits such as insulin pumps, obesity surgery and hospice care.

Lawmakers are bracing

for more work when they reconvene in January. Some states face multibillion-dollar deficits. Federal stimulus money for Medicaid is soon to evaporate. And Medicaid enrollment has never been higher because of job losses. In the view of some lawmakers, Medicaid has become a monster, and it's eating the budget. In Illinois, Medicaid sucks up more money than elementary, secondary and higher education combined. "Medicaid is such a large, complicated part of our budget problem, that to get our hands around it is very difficult. It's that big. It's that bad," said Illinois Sen. Dale Righter, a Republican and co-chairman of a bipartisan panel to reform

Medicaid in Illinois, where nearly 30 percent of total spending goes to the program. Medicaid costs are shared by the federal and state governments. It's not just the poor and disabled who benefit. Wealthier people do, too, such as when middle-class families with elderly parents in nursing homes are relieved of financial pressure after Medicaid starts picking up the bills.

Contrary to stereotype, it's the elderly and disabled who cost nearly 70 cents of every Medicaid dollar, not the single mother and her children.

In California, Medicaid no longer pays for many adult dental services. But it still pays for extractions, that is, tooth-pulling. The unintended consequence: Medicaid patients tell dentists to pull teeth that could be saved.

"The roots are fine. The tooth could be saved with a root canal," said Dr. Nagaraj Murthy, who practices in Compton, Calif. "I had a patient yesterday. I said we could do a root canal. He said, 'No, it's hurting. Go ahead and pull it. I don't have the money.'" Murthy recently pulled an elderly woman's last

tooth, but Medicaid no longer pays for dentures.

"Elderly patients suffer the most," Murthy said. "They're walking around with no teeth." States can decide which optional services Medicaid covers, and dental care is among cutbacks in some places. Last year's economic stimulus package increased the federal share of Medicaid money temporarily. But that money runs out at the end of June, when the federal government will go back to paying half the costs rather than 60 to 70 percent. So more cuts could be ahead.

During the Great Recession, millions of people relied on the Medicaid safety net. Between 2007 and 2009, the number of uninsured Americans grew by more than 5 million as workers lost jobs with employer-based insurance. Another 7 million signed up for Medicaid.

Just when caseloads hit their highest point, the nation's new health care law required states not to change the rules on who's eligible for Medicaid. That means states can't roll up the welcome mat by tightening Medicaid's income requirements.

So states have resorted to a variety of painful options.

In Arizona, lawmakers stopped paying for some kinds of transplants, including livers for people with hepatitis C. When the cuts took effect Oct. 1, Medicaid patient Francisco Felix, who needs a liver, suddenly had to raise \$500,000 to get a transplant. The 32-year-old's case took a dramatic turn in November when a friend's wife died, and her liver became available. Felix was prepped for surgery in hopes financial donations would come in. When the money didn't materialize, the liver went to someone else, and Felix went home. His doctor told him he has a year before he'll be too sick for a transplant.

"They are taking away his opportunity to live," said his wife, Flor Felix. "It's impossible for us or any family to get that much money." The family is collecting donations through a website and plans a yard sale this weekend, she said.

The choices are difficult for states that have already cut payments to doctors and hospitals to the bone. □

Protein reversed memory loss in Alzheimer's mice

By Julie Steenhuysen

CHICAGO — Boosting levels of a memory-related protein reversed memory loss in mice with Alzheimer's disease, a finding that could lead to new approaches to treating people, U.S. researchers said on Monday.

They said raising levels of CREB-binding protein (CBP) -- a protein needed to create long-term memories -- improved memory in mice bred to develop Alzheimer's, a fatal brain-wasting disease that affects memory, thinking, behavior and the ability to handle daily activities.

"We can reverse the learning and memory deficits by increasing the level of this protein called CBP," said Salvatore Oddo of the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio, whose study appears in the in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

He said boosting CBP in mice restores activity of

a protein called CREB and increases levels of yet another protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor or BDNF, proteins needed to develop long-term memory.

"In a mouse that develops symptoms like Alzheimer's disease, these proteins are not activated," Oddo said in a telephone interview. "They may account for the memory impairment in these mice."

Oddo's team used a harmless virus to deliver the protein, then tested learning in memory in the mice using a classic water maze test, in which mice must learn to find an exit platform hidden in a basin of milky liquid.

Alzheimer's mice that had been given the protein performed as well as healthy mice.

"They showed no memory problems whatsoever. They learned the task they were supposed to learn, and when we probed for memory, they remembered what they learned the day before," Oddo said.

Alzheimer's mice given a placebo struggled to learn and remember the task.

Most drugs being developed for Alzheimer's disease focus on halting or removing an excess buildup of a protein called amyloid beta, which destroys synapses, the sites where brain cells share information.

Enhancing CBP would not alter amyloid beta, but it might make memory formation more efficient.

"Pharmaceutical companies could theoretically work toward finding a new drug that may facilitate the expression of this CBP protein," he said.

The work is early and the findings would have to be replicated in other labs and eventually in people, but new treatment approaches are important given that no current drugs have been shown to delay progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's affects 26 million people worldwide and costs \$604 billion to treat. □

Few Lives Saved by Ovarian Cancer Screening: Study

Available ovarian cancer screening only slightly reduces the number of deaths from the disease, a new study finds.

Until more sensitive screening tests can be developed, other strategies, such as better prevention and treatment, are needed to significantly reduce deaths from ovarian cancer, the researchers from Duke University Medical Center said.

The study team used a computer-based model of ovarian cancer progression to assess how effective screening is in reducing deaths from the disease. The model took into account that some types of ovarian cancers grow slowly while others grow more quickly.

Annual screening leads to only a modest decrease in ovarian cancer deaths, found the study, published online Dec. 13 in the journal Cancer.

"If we assume ovarian cancers grow and spread at different rates, the best screening strategy available will only reduce the number of women dying from this cancer by 11 percent. This is partially because the slower-growing cancers are more likely to be caught by a screening test," team leader Dr. Laura Havrilesky said in a journal news release.

The findings support the widely held opinion that many ovarian cancers remain in the early stages for a long time, while advanced-stage ovarian cancers tend to spread rapidly. □

Health Tip: Pregnancy Can Lead to Skin and Hair Changes

Fluctuations in hormone levels and other factors during pregnancy can lead to changes in a woman's skin and hair.

The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists offers these examples:

- Darkened areas on the skin, often the face and breasts.
- Ridges in the belly and abdomen called stretch marks.
- Thicker hair, hair growth in new areas, and possible hair loss after delivery.
- Spider veins or varicose veins.
- Itchy red bumps called pruritic urticarial papules and plaques of pregnancy (PUPPP). □

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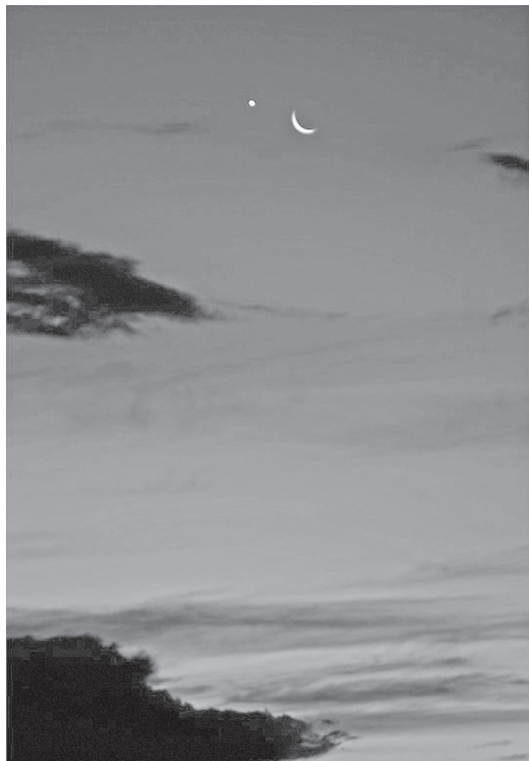
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Venus Visible In the Daytime Sky



Here is a picture of Venus and the Moon in the sky before sunset.

Robert Roy Britt

PHOENIX – Venus is so bright, you can see it even in the daytime right now — if you know where to look.

Spotting Venus in the daytime will put you in an exclusive club: the handful of folks around the world who've ever seen a planet besides our own during daylight.

Here's how to do it:

Go out before sunrise. You can't miss Venus, a brilliant beacon hovering in the predawn eastern sky.

Next, find a good reference point. I suggest standing on the west side of your house or another building and sighting Venus over the roofline. Then project where Venus will be after sunrise. It will follow the same basic path as the sun across the sky, up and to your right. Once the sun is up, you'll have a guidepost to use in finding Venus. You don't need a telescope.

If you plan to get up before sunrise Tuesday

(Dec. 14) to watch the Geminid meteor shower, you'll easily spot Venus, and you can extend the skywatching opportunity to just past dawn.

I used this technique this morning: I noted the spot where I was standing and where Venus was above the roofline, then had my wife stand in the same spot. She found it in just a few seconds.

Our 9-year-old son had to stand a few feet behind my wife to make the geometry work, and a broad smile crossed his face as he spotted the other world and I told him about the exclusive club he'd just joined. Venus appeared as a stark pinpoint of white light against the blue morning sky. It is extremely hard to find if you don't know exactly where to look, but once you find it, it's startling how bright it is. This sky map of Venus after sunrise may help give you an idea of where to look after dawn to see the bright planet. My wife and son were both curious how it's possible that another planet is visible during the day.

This is how it works:

Venus shines with reflected sunlight. Because it is closer to the sun than Earth is, its orbital path never takes it very far from the sun from our point of view. Venus is always behind or in front of the sun (when we can't see it) or off to one side (when we can see it).

That's why Venus is often called the Evening Star or the Morning Star — depending on which side of the sun it's on. That's also why you never see Venus overhead in the night sky.

Outer planets, like Jupiter, can be opposite the sun in our sky, and therefore overhead at night. Because of its size and relative closeness to us, Venus is brighter than any other planet, and only the sun and moon shine brighter.

If you have lots of patience to gaze at Venus nonstop for several minutes, or if you don't have a roofline handy, you can simply find Venus just before the sun comes up, and keep your eye on it until the sun's rays strike your face. Either trick will work any morning this month as Venus continues to shine brightly as the Morning Star —or, as some have called it, the Christmas Star. □



In this Nov. 8, 2010 photo, a wind-driven turbine drives an electrical generator on private property near a site proposed for wind turbines to generate electricity, in the Mojave Desert near the town of Apple Valley, Calif.

(AP Photo/Reed Saxon)

AP Enterprise:

Eagle concerns stymie wind farms

By **NOAKI SCHWARTZ**
JASON DEAREN,

Associated Press

APPLE VALLEY, Calif. — Fears that whirling wind turbines could slaughter protected golden eagles have halted progress on a key piece of the federal government's push to increase renewable energy on public lands, stalling plans for billions of dollars in wind farm developments.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management suspended issuing wind permits on public land indefinitely this summer after wildlife officials invoked a decades-old law for protecting eagles, according to interviews and documents

obtained by The Associated Press.

The restriction has stymied efforts to "fast-track" approvals for four of the seven most promising wind energy proposals in the nation, including all three in California.

Now, these and other projects appear unlikely to make the year-end deadline to potentially qualify for hundreds of millions of dollars in stimulus funds. If extensions aren't granted in the lame duck session of Congress, the future of many of these plans could be in doubt.

"(Companies) are waiting to know the criteria to get a permit," said Larry LaPre, a wildlife biologist for BLM's California desert district, of the companies hoping federal agencies will begin permitting again soon. LaPre said he expects it to be "at least a year or longer" before permitting resumes. Golden eagles are the latest roadblock to establishing wind farms on federally owned land, already an expensive process plagued by years of bureaucratic delay. The projects also have been untracked by other wildlife issues, a sluggish economy and objections by defense and aviation authorities that wind turbines interfere with the country's aged radar system. □

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Cuba lanza su propia versión de Wikipedia

LA HABANA (Reuters) - Cuba lanzará el martes su propia versión de Wikipedia, una enciclopedia online donde su enemigo ideológico Estados Unidos es descrito como el “imperio de nuestra época”.

EcuRed (www.ecured.cu), inspirado en la popular enciclopedia online estadounidense Wikipedia, tenía el lunes 19.345 artículos de referencia, biografías y trabajos académicos en línea.

“Su filosofía es la acumulación y desarrollo del conocimiento con un objetivo democratizador y no lucrativo desde un punto de vista descolonizador”, dice el sitio en su presentación.

La enciclopedia podrá ser consultada en Cuba por alrededor de 1,6 millones de personas con acceso a Internet o en la mayoría de los

casos a una intranet de sitios aprobados por el Gobierno. Las autoridades culpan de su baja tasa de conectividad al embargo comercial impuesto hace casi medio siglo por Estados Unidos, o, según EcuRed, “el imperio de nuestra época”.

“Se ha caracterizado históricamente por despojar por la fuerza a otras naciones y países de territorios y recursos naturales para ponerlos al servicio de sus empresas y monopolios”, dice la entrada sobre Estados Unidos. EcuRed contiene una extensa biografía del líder cubano Fidel Castro, incluyendo su papel tras la enfermedad que lo apartó del poder en el 2006.

“Hoy escribe y participa en la lucha de ideas a nivel mundial. Por su autoridad moral, influye en importantes y estratégicas decisiones de la Revolución”, dice.

Dominicana:

Manifestantes exigen mejor educación

SANTO DOMINGO (AP) - Cientos de manifestantes se concentraron frente a la sede del congreso para exigir que el 4% del PIB se invierta en educación, en momentos en que los diputados dominicanos se aprestan a aprobar el presupuesto público para el 2011.

El proyecto de presupuesto, que ya fue aprobado por el Senado el 10 de diciembre, sólo tiene previsto destinar 1,9% del PIB a la educación, pese a que la ley ordena el 4%. En caso de que los diputados aprueben la pieza, “nosotros vamos a presentar un recurso ante la Suprema Corte para que declare inconstitucional ese presupuesto”, dijo a la AP la abogada Elizabeth Mateo, de la organización civil Toy Jarto (Estoy hartos).

“Menos yipetas (vehículos todo terreno) y más educación”, proclaman algunas de las pancartas amarillas que portan los manifestantes en referencia a los autos de lujo de los legisladores y de sus ingresos. Los diputados se aprobaron un bono navideño de cerca de 20.000 dólares para cada uno de los 183 legisladores, mientras más del 60% de los trabajadores dominicanos percibe menos de 10.000 pesos (270 dólares) mensuales, según cifras del Banco Central. □



Foto de archivo de un grupo de personas en medio de una calle en La Habana, oct 26 2010. Cuba lanzará el martes su propia versión de Wikipedia, una enciclopedia online donde su enemigo ideológico Estados Unidos es descrito como el ‘imperio de nuestra época’. REUTERS/Desmond Boylan

También hay un artículo sobre su hermano, el presidente Raúl Castro, a quien EcuRed presenta como “combatiente revolucionario, dirigente político, estadista y jefe militar”.

“Ha contribuido con relevantes aportes a las luchas del pueblo cubano en defensa de su soberanía e independencia”, dice sobre Raúl Castro. EcuRed no menciona

las reformas económicas introducidas este año por Raúl Castro para actualizar el modelo socialista cubano y que están siendo objeto de un debate nacional. □

Papa envía mensaje a víctimas de alud en Colombia

BELLO, COLOMBIA (AP) - El embajador colombiano en el Vaticano, César Mauricio Velásquez, transmitió el domingo un mensaje verbal del papa Benedicto XVI a las víctimas de las intensas lluvias en esta nación andina, en especial a los parientes de los 62 muertos en un alud ocurrido hace una semana en Bello.

“El Papa se une al dolor de las víctimas del invierno en Colombia, en especial de las víctimas y familiares de la tragedia en Bello”, dijo Velásquez a los reporteros tras reunirse con damnificados y autoridades de la localidad.

El Pontífice también solicitó “la ayuda internacional” para socorrer a los miles de damnificados por los aguaceros en Colombia, agregó Velásquez, quien llegó la semana pasada a Colombia.

El 5 de diciembre un deslave de unas 50.000 metros cúbicos de tierra de una colina arrastró y sepultó al menos 30 humildes viviendas de una barriada en Bello, a unos 250 kilómetros al noroeste de Bogotá.

Desde el día del alud y hasta este domingo se han recuperado 62 cuerpos, indicó en diálogo telefónico Oscar Pérez, alcalde de Bello.

Aunque inicialmente las autoridades calcularon que las personas sepultadas podían ser al menos 124, por un censo hecho tras el deslave entre parientes y moradores de la zona, después de una semana de remoción de tierra, los equipos de rescate consideran que la cifra podría ser menor porque han encontrado menos cuerpos que los hallados en las primeras jornadas, dijo Pérez.

El presidente Juan Manuel Santos seguía reunido el domingo con su gabinete estudiando medidas para paliar las consecuencias de las lluvias y que han dejado al menos 230 muertos en todo el año, incluyendo las víctimas fatales de Bello.

Además de las muertes, las lluvias han causado este año que cientos de hectáreas de cultivos se pierdan en inundaciones, al igual que vías anegadas o bloqueadas por derrumbes, mientras más de 200.000 casas, la mayoría de ellas en empobrecidas regiones del país, han resultado averiadas.

En el 2009, las lluvias provocaron 110 muertos y en el 2008 las víctimas fatales fueron 48, según datos de la Cruz Roja Colombiana. □

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